MYTH, MEDIA, AND CULTURE IN STAR WARS

AN ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY

DOUGLAS BRODE AND LEAH DEYNEKA

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Myth, Media, and Culture in *Star Wars*

An Anthology

Edited by
Douglas Brode
Leah Deyneka



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For my son, Shane Johnson Brode,
the original *Star Wars* kid.

—Douglas Brode



To my parents, Joe and Judy, and my sisters,
Elisa, Larissa, and Tammy, who have
tirelessly bolstered my *Star Wars* obsession.
Thank you also to Professor Douglas Brode for
creating such a fantastic *Star Wars* course and
proposing the idea for this anthology.

—Leah Deyneka

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—Leah Deyneka

Introduction

"Of That Time, of That Place"

Douglas Brode

These are the legends that prove special since, like the Bible, Greek mythology, Shakespeare, and the collected films of John Ford, certain narrative works do not merely satisfy an audience at the time of their release only to disappear, sooner or later displaced by the next "big thing" to come ambling or roaring down the pike. While other stories, some extremely striking, perhaps well received at a specific juncture in history, come and go, we are talking now about those that pass the test of time. These are the legends that prove special in that, however pleasurable and/or profound they may have appeared long, long ago, in some past culture near or far, far away, they speak over the years, the decades, the centuries, even in some rare and remarkable cases, the millennia. More incredible, they do so to far-flung societies that often share nothing but such ongoing yarns and the basic ideas contained within them. These are our uber-stories, meaningful as well as absorbing after other tales, temporary in value, have fallen by the wayside, forgotten except by scholars of antiquity.

In each such case, a combination of the universal story itself and the unique manner of its telling causes the piece to continue to move mass audiences and individual receivers, despite ever-changing fads and fashions. This includes the coming and going of political, philosophical, cultural, and religious outlooks. Indeed, in some cases, the iconic tales are responsible for those very changes. They are, simply put, the stories that most powerfully answer certain essential questions raised by the world's first philosophers, back when man ceased to merely accept his own existence. At this point humankind rose above any animal origins by questioning life: What does it mean to be a man? What is our place in the universe? Why are we here, and ought we to pursue that final question from birth to death?

Is in fact that, rather than daily existence and survival on the most obvious level, precisely what defines us?

For some, it may seem preposterous and pretentious to compare a set of six science-fiction/space fantasy films of a popcorn variety to those works cited above. Yet it is worth remembering that Shakespeare's plays were not taken seriously at the time of their initial productions, thought of, roughly between 1590 and 1610, as blood-and-guts time-killers for the least discriminating audiences, excepting those more refined comedies written for court audiences. People came to the matinees after visiting gaming houses, before heading for the brothels. They carried in turkey legs and threw the bones at any hiss-able villains, Macbeth the Darth Vader of his era and quite likely the progenitor, however unconsciously, of Anakin Skywalker. Yet as the years passed, and the more seemingly intellectual plays by Christopher Marlowe became quaint and curious relics, the high drama and low comedy of Shakespeare continued on, even after the prevalent values of the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages had turned to dust. Shakespeare is Shakespeare, whether done on film in modern settings or in the vivid conventions of Kabuki theatre. True, *Star Wars* is only a little more than thirty-five years old. Then again, this is the modern age, when as Alvin Toffler explained at its beginning in 1970, *Future Shock* causes most new contenders in the pop culture field to vanish before we, with our shortened attention spans, have even begun to adjust to them. In such a new reality, the survival of any objets d'art and/or entertainment products (if there is indeed a difference between the two) for three and a half decades-plus could be compared to three and a half centuries at a time when changes were glacially slow.

The chapters included here, like those in *Sex, Politics, and Religion in* Star Wars, were all chosen for their quality in examining some aspect of *Star Wars*' ongoing appeal and continuing impact. Here we focus less, perhaps, on the films themselves than the multimedia experience *Star Wars*, the franchise, has become, in every imaginable venue from toys and collectables to theme park rides to comic books and television shows. Individual readers will, of course, likely agree with some of the approaches that are collected here while disagreeing with others, precisely as with *Sex, Politics, and Religion*. That was to be expected, even hoped for.

Yet if we set out to include chapters that take psychological and diverse other points of view on the original *Star Wars* film and its world of offshoots, we hoped to never lose sight of the fact that, on initial viewing, back in 1977 or, for some young person who happens upon it today and for the first time, George Lucas's film was, and always will be, a Hollywood entertainment: a movie that assumed, as its primary purpose, the dual desire to please as many people as possible with moments of action and romance that, along with what were then state-of-the-art F/X (special effects), would thrill, excite, and allow for enjoyment in a theater, thus making a great

deal of money for everyone from Lucas himself to 20th Century Fox, the distributor.

Star Wars, whatever it may have come to mean to us during that intervening period, was a film for its own time; to fail to recognize this at the outset would be to misread it entirely, no matter how many mythic elements we may discover in its subtexts. Like his counterpart and on some occasions collaborator Steven Spielberg, Lucas came of age in the 1950s, when the greatest role models tended to be Westerners: Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry, and Roy Rogers left over from the 1930s and 1940s, their careers revived and enhanced by the new medium of television. Soon TV had its own cowboy heroes galore, shows boasting the names of their factual or fictional heroes: *Cheyenne, The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp, Range Rider, Wild Bill Hickok*, even a proto-feminist version in *Annie Oakley*. In each, kids experienced a good guy (or girl) who took on the forces of darkness in a Hollywood version of the historical west. Importantly, there was science fiction, too: Buster Crabbe's Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers serials from twenty years earlier filled the early-afternoon post-school hours, soon joined by new shows such as *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*. Ever since the end of World War II in 1945, the conquest of space had ceased to be simply an exotic fantasy, as in the past. With America's space program attempting to penetrate the skies before the Russians, locked in a Cold War with us, could win that honor the concept of intergalactic travel was on everyone's mind.

A few of the new breed of sci-fi writers, most notably Robert Heinlein (who scripted George Pal's *Destination Moon* film in 1950, featuring a non-fanciful depiction of how such a voyage would likely occur within the next twenty years), addressed outer space in the most realistic of terms. Mostly though, true science fiction (writing the history of the future) made way for more examples of cowboys in space. If Westerns and sci-fi shows boasted notably different costumes and set designs, what they had in common was an American version of the old Manichaean sensibility: There was good and there was bad. As John Wayne put it in *The Alamo* (1960), a man's gotta choose between one and the other, then stick to his guns, be they six-shooters or laser pistols. And the holsters in which our heroes—a newly revived *Flash Gordon* plus *Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers, Rocky Jones, Space Ranger*—wore them looked pretty much identical.

All that would change during the 1960s, when Lucas attended college, then ceased to be only a film buff and as part of a New Wave entered that industry. If we could still cheer for old-fashioned heroes during that decade's early years, be they conservative/pro-Establishment (Charlton Heston in *El Cid*) or liberal/anti-Establishment (Kirk Douglas in *Spartacus*), such epics were gone by 1970. So were musicals, gangster films, and conventional romances, the genre films Hollywood had been churning out regularly since the turn of the twentieth century no longer speaking to a public at large.

These had been replaced by offbeat, edgy crime films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* and unconventional romances on the order of *The Graduate*, both released in 1967, the year that those old-timers who still ran Hollywood began to realize their era was over. The audience that had once flocked to see their films had aged, now staying home to watch those movies again on TV. Young people had emerged as the great new audience. They were a different kind of youth than their parents had been. With an ever-larger percentage attending college, many were inspired at its beginning by the election of relatively young John F. Kennedy as president. His assassination in 1963 undermined that emergent optimism, leading to a sense that a great dream for a better future had been whisked away before they had even begun to realize it. Many of those college students remained loyal to the Civil Rights cause Kennedy had championed, though now things turned violent as they marched South to try to integrate America. Meanwhile the war in Southeast Asia, which had never been declared and made no sense to a great number of young people, escalated, leading to an antiwar movement.

By 1969, the radical so-called Hippie Era was in full (if surprisingly brief) swing. As always, popular culture found new voices to express the inherent ideology of those times. The old genre films could only continue to exist if reinvented. In the Western *Little Big Man* (1970), Indians were the good guys, Custer and the Seventh Cavalry racist imperialists rather than the all-American heroes of earlier films on the subject. The film that most perfectly captured the darkness into which America had plunged—the war still dragging on, a drug-plague enveloping the country, and then the Watergate scandal that caused President Nixon to resign—was Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976): Its antihero, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), a dark philosopher/hack who cruises the neon nightscape, condemning all the whores, homosexuals, and druggies lining the ruined streets of New York, finally emerges from the newly installed porno palaces to become a would-be assassin of an important politician. The tone of such films, like the age itself, had turned from the bleak existentialism of the late 1960s to a harder, colder, all-encroaching nihilism during the 1970s' first half.

Shortly after the release of the first such film, *Easy Rider* (1969), its director/co-writer/co-star, Dennis Hopper, announced what he believed to be the film's key message: "I don't believe in heroes anymore."[1] By heroes, Hopper referred to those played by John Wayne and other old-time stars in countless "oaters" perceived as conservative in nature. Hopper had appeared in several, including *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), *The Sons of Katie Elder* (1965), and *True Grit* (1969). Wayne won the Best Actor Oscar for the latter, which appealed mainly to older viewers. Young people flocked to see *Midnight Cowboy*, an X-rated item that, title aside, was about antiheroes: street hustlers, nonviolent Travis Bickle, who survive in modern Manhattan.

Ten years later, Hopper supported the presidential bid of a longtime Wayne pal and onetime TV-movie cowboy hero, Ronald Reagan, who campaigned wearing a cowboy hat in front of the Texas Alamo, setting of Wayne's most famous old-time hero film from 1960, before America darkened. Another great favorite of the late 1960s to early 1970s youth culture, Bob Dylan, like Hopper announced his conversion to conservative values and voted for Reagan. Simply put, enough was enough. America wanted to believe in heroes again, including those very youth-spokespersons who had decried such stuff less than a decade earlier. With Reagan's ascension to the White House in a landslide victory, supported by young as well as older Americans, it only made sense that pop culture would likewise embrace if not the older order then some sort of reconfigured hero worship. By the late 1970s, old-fashioned heroes had already made a comeback, notably Christopher Reeve in *Superman* (1978). *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) would shortly bring the two most significant filmmakers of this upcoming era together to create Indiana Jones who, in his leather jacket and fedora, looked a great deal like the charming characters Wayne and Reagan had played back in the 1940s and 1950s. Here was retro entertainment, now played with contemporary glibness for a neo-audience that yearned to enjoy all the formulas, if now with "an edge," necessary owing to all they—we—had been through.

The first such hero was Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) in the original *Star Wars* movie. Some observers insisted that the box-office sensation of *Star Wars* could be read by those who perceive public entertainment and national politics as inseparable, as an early indicator of how things would turn out at polling places in 1979. As Peter Lev has put it:

> *Star Wars* has often been discussed as a harbinger of the renewed American conservatism of the Reagan presidency. It is certainly part of the move toward simple, optimistic genre films in the late 1970s. The clean-cut well-spoken white youths of the film seem to come out of an idealized version of the 1950s, and the clear division between good and evil governments suggests the Cold War.[2]

Here we face the difficulty of analyzing *Star Wars* from any political position. On the surface, it could not be more liberal or antiestablishment. The heroes are rebels, Robin Hood figures set in what may be another dimension, and that certainly is a "created universe," fighting against Fascist dictatorship. If the films were conservative, wouldn't our audience loyalties be the other way around? Yet there are diverse meanings to the term "conservative." Others include believing in traditional heroes rather than deeply troubled antiheroes; in an ultimate battle between Good and Evil; seeing men as the doers in life, women more as damsels in distress, each pretty princess needing to be rescued by "a hero"; an unerring belief that

God (or what we might rename The Force) exists, is benign, and will ensure that things turn out right in the end, no matter how many troubles we encounter along the way; and that a film ought to cross generations, bringing entire families to the movies in a ritualistic experience not all that unlike churches and other houses of worship. In that sense of the term, *Star Wars* (along with Indiana Jones and most everything Lucas, Spielberg, and other filmmakers of their vent turn out) is indeed conservative, or "traditional," even if the people who created it perceive their vision as a liberal one and choose to vote that way during elections.

It's not for nothing that Martin Scorsese, whose *Mean Streets* (1973) and *Taxi Driver* had all but defined the early 1970s, found it difficult to get a film financed after the box-office disaster that was *New York, New York* (1977). Many viewers, older and younger, had gone to see that musical expecting a charming throwback to the MGM All Singing, All Dancing Extravaganzas only to be offended by the cynicism of the piece, which dared to feature an unhappy ending. When Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) appeared, this brooding Vietnam drama struck many as a throwback to and final example of the kinds of films that had been so plentiful at the decade's beginning, but that were now going out of style as an era of escapism replaced them.

To a degree, Lucas and Spielberg re-created the old-fashioned Hollywood that they had loved in their youth. The 1980s, like the 1950s, would as a result largely be an era of what are referred to in the industry as Popcorn Pictures, made for entertainment rather than enlightenment. Clearly, then, the social context in which *Star Wars* first appeared had a great deal to do with the manner in which the public perceived it at that time. In many cases, audiences rose en masse at the end to cheer; in so doing, they acknowledged its quality, the manner in which it had satisfied their expectations. However, many viewers applauded as the film began; here, they acknowledged their love—America's love and, considering the international appeal, human love—of the type of Hollywood movie it represented, and their own desire, after the better part of a decade of moral confusion and demanding complexity, to once more see the world as a simple place where things always worked out right. Perhaps *Jaws* (1975) and *Rocky* (1976) had paved the way, but Lucas crystallized what had been developing while setting the pace for a retro-future with *Star Wars*. However we have seen it since, or will perceive it in the future, this was the true meaning of *Star Wars* at that time, in that place.

NOTES

1. Interview with the author, spring 1971.

2. Peter Lev, *American Films of the 70s: Conflicting Visions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 168.

1

"Cowboys in Space"

Star Wars and the Western Film

Douglas Brode

When George Lucas stepped into an executive office at 20th Century Fox in 1974 and pitched his upcoming idea for an intergalactic adventure epic as "cowboys in space," he was not the first person to have presented such an idea to major players in "the industry." Some twelve years earlier Gene Rodenberry (1921–1991) said much the same thing to the powers that be at NBC when he hoped to launch his upcoming series *Star Trek* (1966–1969). According to most accounts, Rodenberry's precise phrase had been "*Wagon Train* in space." This referral, lost on many young people today, is to a previous series that had played Wednesday evenings on NBC between 1957 and 1962. Cancelled by that network following a successful five-year run, often ranking number two or even one in the Nielsens, *Wagon Train* moved over to ABC. There, for another three years, the show ran on Wednesday, Monday, and finally Sunday evenings, if with ever declining ratings. By 1965, *Wagon Train* was gone, as were the vast majority of Westerns that had flourished a decade earlier.

As its title indicated, *Wagon Train* dealt with a caravan of pioneers traveling west across the American frontier. The pilgrims were led by a stern but fair wagon-master (originally played by Ward Bond, the lead assumed by John McIntire after Bond's passing in 1960). He was abetted by a dependable trail boss (Terry Wilson), a comical cook (Frank McGrath), and a succession of handsome scouts (Robert Horton, Denny Miller, Robert Fuller), more or less the crew of Rodenberry's "Enterprise" in embryo. Each episode focused on various members of the train or intriguing people they met in those diverse towns, forts, farms, ranches, and other remote places. Rodenberry's idea was to reset that premise on the final frontier, advancing the concept from past to future, from horse opera to space opera.

A definition of terms is in order here. Though often referred to as science fiction, and to some degree filling the rules of that genre, in truth *Star Trek*, like Lucas's *Star Wars*, is better described by that alternate term. At its purest, science fiction obediently pays homage to the laws of science, fictionalizing what likely could or would happen in a future firmly grounded in what's known in the present about space or time travel, future life on earth, and so forth. Space opera allows for a more creative range of the imagination. As Lucas would recollect on numerous occasions, *Star Wars* moved over to space fantasy, or space opera, the moment he made the decision to allow his audience to hear explosions during the pitched battles between spacecraft; of course, there can be no such thing as sound in space. The term space opera was first employed by Wilson Tucker in 1941 to describe far-out tales in that era's pulp magazines, distinguishing between them and more serious-minded work by writers like Jules Verne or H. G. Wells at fin-de-siècle, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell during the twentieth century.

Basically desultory, the term horse opera was seldom used to refer to a realistic story of life on the frontier such as John Ford's sound-era movies, running from *Stagecoach* (1939) through *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *The Searchers* (1956) to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962): that is, works in which that filmmaker attempted, within the limits of fictional narrative, to get individual details (weaponry, clothing, buildings) precise, the big picture as close to actuality possible. These were referred to as "epic Westerns." Horse operas, on the other hand, were escapist-fantasy "oaters" (another dismissive term) of the sort that Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and William "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd appeared in: delightful little diversions for children of all ages, seldom with any viable or meaningful connection to our actual pioneer era.

In a horse opera, a hero could fire endless rounds from a six-shooter, shoot the pistol out of a bad guy's hand, sing like a bird, leap from tall cliffs (there weren't any tall buildings around yet) with a Superman-like bound, then fight for truth, justice, and the American way. Epics by Ford and others—Howard Hawks (*Red River*, 1948), Fred Zinnemann (*High Noon*, 1952), George Stevens (*Shane*, 1953), Anthony Mann (*The Man from Laramie*, 1955), and William Wyler (*The Big Country*, 1958) among them—featured complex characters with limited abilities, much like human beings in any modern drama. In most cases, the dramatic lines were no different from what we might encounter in a contemporary piece, other than the setting and period. Understandably then, a movie about corruption in the financial or business world such as *House of Strangers* (1949) could be remade as a Western (*Broken Lance*, 1954); a John Dillinger type of rural gangster (*High Sierra*, 1941) could easily be transformed into a film about a Billy the Kid type of rustic bandit (*Colorado Territory*, 1949), director Raoul Walsh making both movies.

Lucas drew on many elements for his conception of the *Star Wars* universe, from the high art of Akira Kurosawa's samurai epics to the lowbrow fun of the *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* comic strips and movie cliffhangers. In filmed versions of each, the title character was played by Buster Crabbe, an Olympic award-winning swimmer whose acting abilities were limited at best. Yet his heroic mien (he also played Tarzan) seemed perfect for such parts. It's worth noting here, in context, that Crabbe's other great success came in inexpensive oaters about a lovable cowboy, "Billy Cody," outlaw Billy Bonny reimagined as a good guy. As these, along with space-fantasy serials, were among the first Hollywood films to be released to television in the early 1950s, Lucas would have come of age watching Crabbe as a cowboy *and* in space. He could not help but notice, then, that such heroes were one and the same, in different garb, one in the future, the other the past. Even before hearing the term space opera for the first time, Lucas, like other members of the original TV generation, had to be aware of the similarities between the two genres.

A fusion that proved popular as TV fare between 1950 and 1955 was *The Phantom Empire* (1935), a twelve-episode serial from Poverty Row producers Mascot. Gene Autry played a cowboy who discovers a society at once retro and futuristic, Murania, deep below his ranch. Though many people today mistakenly believe this serial played off Autry's stardom as a Singin' Cowboy for Republic Pictures, it was actually made *before* he took the lead in his first oater. So there it was, in front of Lucas's eyes: the cowboy if not in space then certainly a spaced-out fantasy. Shortly, newly shot action shows for kids were divided between space opera and horse opera: *Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers; Tom Corbett, Space Cadet; Rocky Jones, Space Ranger* and *The Lone Ranger, Buffalo Bill Jr.*, and *Range Rider*. By the time Lucas reached his teen years, earlier kiddie Westerns would seem a tad silly. No problem, however; the adult TV Western was born with *Gunsmoke, The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*, and *Cheyenne* in 1955. The lead character in each had less to do with those played by Crabbe in B movies than John Wayne in films by Ford, Hawks, and Walsh: deeply troubled men who did their best to get the job done if often faltering along the way.

For that matter *Wagon Train* had been based on a Ford film, *Wagon Master* (1950), in which Bond had played an all-but-identical role. Wayne eventually showed up as a guest star in one episode directed by Ford himself ("The Colter Craven Story," 11/23/60). Roddenberry's *Star Trek* show had been an attempt to do for TV what *Wagon Train* had less than a decade earlier: prove that a more adult version, this one character rather than action driven, could succeed. It's no coincidence that during *Star Trek*'s run, the Western all but disappeared from the airwaves and theater screens. By 1970 Hollywood's B oater, once a staple, was nowhere to be seen; violent Italian-made variations, referred to as Spaghetti Westerns, took up the slack.

Likewise, the old-fashioned "A" Western also diminished, particularly after John Wayne and James Stewart appeared in *Liberty Valance*, Ford even then on the verge of retirement. Melancholy and anti-romantic, that end-game saga would be released months before "B" cowboys Randolph Scott and Joel McCrea paired for the first time in Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country* (1962), a sweet, sad farewell to the tightly budgeted films those old hands had perfected. After *How the West Was Won* (1962), a larger-even-than-usual mega-epic (originally released in Cinerama) that included in its cast Wayne, Stewart, and Henry Fonda, the three seminal "A" Western stars, along with every tradition (some might say cliché)—mountain men, the Civil War, a wagon train, Indian fighting, outlaw gangs—it seemed impossible that Hollywood could ever again offer such a conventional genre piece.

Instead, the clichés were spoofed, first in *Cat Ballou* (1965), eventually in *Blazing Saddles* (1974). Audiences now lovingly laughed at what they had once sincerely believed in. As for an epic, Sergio Leone offered an apotheosis of that genre in an ironic manner via *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), its very title announcing that what had once been believed was now grasped by the public as an elaborate fairy tale. The epic Western did survive by turning against everything it once stood for. *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970) reversed the values of *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941) by positing Custer and the Seventh Cavalry (and, by abstraction, Anglo society) as the bad guys, the Sioux and Cheyenne as heroes at Little Big Horn. Some film historians insist that such movies were not Westerns at all but anti-Westerns, cinematic attacks on the previous genre.

Why the turnabout in attitude? The initial blow derived from the optimism of the early 1960s. When Jack Kennedy ran for president under The New Frontier banner, the old west suddenly seemed irrelevant. This appeared truer after the young chief-ex promised to put a man on the moon by decade's end. "Don't look back," Bob Dylan would shortly say, speaking for his generation as well as his individual self. *Star Trek*, conceived if not aired at this period, featured a similar phrase, The Final Frontier. With the president's assassination in 1963, our world was turned upside down and inside out. Optimism immediately dissolved, cynicism and pessimism appearing in its place, particularly after the assassinations of two other political figures who were similarly perceived as savior-like, Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, in 1968. During that same year America had to deal with the ever-escalating undeclared war in Vietnam, the ever-more-angry and violent tenor of the Civil Rights Movement, and then, some five years later, Watergate and the unmaking of another president, Richard Nixon. No wonder this proved to be a difficult time for people to go on believing in the once bright American Dream.

Nowhere had that success ethic been more enshrined than in the Western film, which said through its dramatic tales that Anglo Americans could con-

quer anything, turn wilderness into a civilization. Now, however, Americans began to wonder about the moral correctness of that process. Had the cutting down of great forests actually been anti-ecological, the Green Movement just then beginning? Was the defeat of Indian tribes racist, our nation forged on a genocidal crime?

With such thoughts, people turned away from the genre that had once captured and enshrined a positive myth about America. This was the age of urban-angst-cinema beginning with *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), its title an ironic comment on the seemingly deceased Western genre, as the title figure is a Texas-born 42nd Street hustler, culminating in *Taxi Driver* (1976), in which the antihero eventually dresses up like a Mohawk with plans of massacring Anglos. "Travis Bickle" (Robert De Niro) is even named after William Barrett Travis, the once lionized commander of the Alamo (1836). Gradually, though, the public became exhausted with such stuff. After an era of glumness, people wanted to believe in Western heroes again. This would be attested to in real life when Ronald Reagan, former star of film and TV oaters, ran for the presidency and won. Often, Reagan campaigned in a heroic white cowboy hat, at one point posing in front of the Alamo, shrine of old-fashioned cowboy heroism.

Following Reagan's overwhelming electoral victory, numerous filmmakers attempted to bring back such heroes and the Western's antiheroes as well. These included Clint Eastwood in *Bronco Billy* and Steve McQueen in *Tom Horn*, both released in 1980. Despite major stars, such films didn't really catch on. In fact, the effective way to bring back the Western was not to revive the old settings, outdated the moment that Kennedy's prediction came true in 1969 and we had begun the age during which space would be pioneered; rather reinvent the Western by repositioning its essence not on the old frontier but in an entirely other galaxy.

That the result would be an epic fantasy rather than science fiction was made clear the moment the first *Star Wars* announced that this tall tale took place not in some far off future but a long time ago . . . once upon a time . . . on Tatooine! Lucas freely drew from both "B" oaters and Western epics, with their innocent heroes and jaded antiheroes. Just as gentle Stewart and rough-hewn Wayne come together to fight an evil empire and its death-dealing representative (Lee Marvin) in *Liberty Valance*, so will idealistic Luke take on Darth Vader in the company of a seasoned noble-outlaw, Han Solo. Everything old is new again, just so long as the special effects are state-of-the-art, and the mythic confrontation of good winning out over evil in the long run is openly presented as what it always was: a fantasy of the way things ought to be, not a true image of the way they once were.

Solidifying *Star Wars*' immediate identification with the Western, the introduction of Han in *A New Hope* is drawn from two scenes in *The Gunfighter* (Henry King, 1950). This early example in the Western-noir cycle

that dominated during the 1950s concerned itself with wandering pistolero Ringo (Gregory Peck). In that film's opening sequence, Ringo enters a saloon where a young punk (Richard Jaeckel) forces him into a shoot-out that ends with the boy dead on the barroom floor. Later, Ringo backs off another, similar kid (Skip Homeier) by insisting that he has a gun pointed at the lad underneath the table at which Ringo sits. The two sequences are collapsed into one another for the famed mid-movie confrontation between Han and Greedo, in a far-out cantina modeled after the ones in *The Gunfighter*.

King's film with Peck, like Ford's with Wayne, was an "A" Western that would endlessly be copied in myriad B pictures. The Wayne vehicles would provide Lucas with a keen sense of direction as to where he wanted his space opera, really a reset horse opera, to go. Early in *A New Hope*, Luke stands far out in the desert in the company of old Obi-Wan, his mentor, and C-3PO, a perfect if perfectly lovable fool. Suddenly Luke grasps that his aunt and uncle back on the farm are in danger of annihilation. He hurries to help but is too late, arriving as black smoke clouds up into the air. The sequence is identical to the one in *The Searchers* in which Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter) hurries ahead of his wise mentor, Ethan Edwards (Wayne), and a gentle buffoon, Old Mose Harper (Hank Worden). Likewise, Martin gets home too late to help. Meanwhile, the cave Luke and his companions spoke in was the one located in Bronson Canyon, California, that Ford had employed twice in *The Searchers*: first when Wayne and Hunter must find a hiding place from pursuing Indians, later when Debbie (Natalie Wood) runs away from Wayne, fearing that he intends to kill her. At that moment, Wayne is no heroic Westerner, not even an antihero, but a potential villain, some Darth Vader of post–Civil War Texas, menacing what in context appears to be a frontier Princess Leia, this girl who is his niece and, if the affair between Ethan and his brother's wife was indeed consummated, possibly his daughter.

The Oedipal theme was as essential to *The Searchers* as it will be in *Star Wars*, if necessarily muted in the earlier film owing to restrictions then in place. In Lucas's work, Luke grasps that he's the son of the terrible Darth Vader, though in his own imagination Luke perhaps hoped and/or believed his biological dad would turn out to be good Obi-Wan Kenobi. *The Searchers* presents us with a situation at once more subtle and complex. Though the movie never openly addresses the point, there are clear indications that Ethan ("I ain't your uncle!") Edwards may be the unnamed man who fathered Martin with a Native American woman; these are far more pronounced in the 1954 novel by Alan Le May. Properly understood, at least from our post–*Star Wars* perspective, Ethan is a strange combination of Obi-Wan and Darth Vader, alternately soft and compassionate, dark and menacing, a Jekyll-Hyde figure that the audience alternately loves and hates, as does Martin himself.

While the rift between Ethan and his brother Aaron (Walter Coy) is likewise never explained with any clarity (so much the better, as we are left to always wonder about the quietly tense situation), so will that between soul-brothers Obi-Wan and Anakin be fully developed by Lucas, who might have pitched his film as "*The Searchers* in Space," most likely not doing so as he feared that the business people who by then had taken over Hollywood would not "get" his reference. In Ford's film, the attraction of Ethan to Aaron's wife Martha is so ripe it appears ready to explode, particularly in the long opening homecoming sequence. This situation comes to a head in their single explosive moment alone, their bond observed by the political and spiritual leader (Ward Bond) when Ethan assumes Aaron's place with the posse of Rangers to pursue "The Comanch." Ethan likely is the father rather than uncle of the notably dark-haired "Little Debbie" (Natalie Wood, with a younger version of her character played by Lana, her younger sister), less so the other blond girl and boy who resemble their dad. If that is the case, Martin and Debbie are the brother and sister (half, at least) that they emotionally believe themselves to be, creating an even closer parallel to them and Luke and Leia, who transform from a potential romantic couple into loving siblings.

Toward the end of *The Searchers*, Ethan Edwards rides into a Comanche camp, planning to massacre everyone there. This is not the beloved Wayne of *McLintock!* (1963) and other films in which he more or less plays himself, or the popular image of him as a decent if cantankerous cattleman. What we see here is a onetime hero who has gone over entirely to the Dark Side, leaving us to wonder if there is any possibility for redemption. He will in fact achieve that by not killing Debbie, supposedly his niece, more likely his daughter. Much the same thing happens with Anakin Skywalker in the prequel trilogy, in which we witness, onscreen, the process that was left implied by Ford: the gradual changeover from good to bad man. The sequence in which Anakin approaches a village of desert dwellers who hold his mother captive is all but identical in mood, tone, and atmosphere to the one that has Edwards closing in on the camp of "Chief Scar." Making the relationship between Anakin/Vader and Wayne, at his most frightening, all the more tangible is that moment in *Episode 6—Return of the Jedi* in which Luke refuses to fight and kill his father. At that moment, Luke is Montgomery Clift as Matthew Garth at the end of *Red River*, unable to shoot his own foster-father Tom Dunson (Wayne) despite the danger to himself. In both films, Wayne's tragic figure is redeemed, happily in the Hawks movie, less so in Ford's. We should not then be surprised when Darth turns back to the early Anakin at the last possible moment, as once upon a time we are again in . . . the west—figuratively speaking, of course.

Writing about *Star Wars*, Robert Jewett could as easily have been describing *The Searchers* when he noted: "This kind of film-going is more than

mere entertainment. It involves a ritualistic reenactment of a story of salvation, comparable to the function of religious rituals" that are "studied by anthropologists and theologians."[1] Redemption is at heart a religious, or at least spiritual, concept that works more effectively in certain types of genres than others. Westerns have always been rife with redemption themes, and in opting to make an outer-space Western rather than science fiction, Lucas was quite right in seizing on such an approach. Also, *Star Wars* is about the death of one way of life in its own "world" and the birth of another. As such, it can be seen as an origination myth, precisely what tales about conquering the frontier were for generations of Americans. Again, in Jewett's words: "Like most popular films in modern America, particularly ones that attract audiences" that opt "to see them repeatedly, it reveals the formative values of the culture and to some degree forms those values as well."[2] If we can no longer see ourselves in the traditional Western, then perhaps we can continue to do so in space fantasy.

In truth, though, the influence of the Western cuts across international boundaries. As another essay in this volume ably proves, the films of Akira Kurosawa, which Lucas viewed at film school, even as he had absorbed the works of Ford and other Western-makers earlier on his own, impacted greatly on *Star Wars*. It would be wrong, though, to ignore the fact that Kurosawa had, in turn, been influenced by Ford, and that it was his exposure to Ford's Westerns that caused Kurosawa to stop making contemporary dramas and do period pictures instead. "There is one person, I feel, I would like to resemble as I grow old," Kurosawa once stated, "the late American film director John Ford. I have always paid attention to his films."[3] It's been pointed out often that Kurosawa did not merely revive the historical samurai but reinvented that figure, employing as his template the American Western's gunfighter. Had Kurosawa been truer to actual events, the onscreen notion of a samurai warrior might be far different than it is, that being a cowboy hero in Asian costume.

That cowboy hero never, of course, actually existed in the old west, where realistic people struggled to survive. The Man of the West was an invention, the image of one of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, revived for an American vision of our own country's golden age, as mythic as are the tales of romance and adventure at the glorious Camelot that, if it ever did exist, would have been a wood fortress with mud huts. Though Rebecca A. Umland was in fact speaking of film adaptations of the Arthurian legends, she might well have been considering the six *Star Wars* episodes when she noted that "like the epic tradition in literature, such films frequently take as their theme the establishment of a religion or a nation."[4] And, in the case of the most significant such works, they did both, particularly when we keep in mind that until the establishment of America's separation of church and state, the spiritual faith and workings of the *polis* were—in societies as

diverse as the ancient Hebrews and the Greeks during their classical age—if not precisely one and the same then certainly intertwined and fused.

What we are dealing with, then, in the historical Western as in *Star Wars*, is an origination myth: the story of the beginning, or a new beginning, to a society, in terms of its spiritual and social order, even as Arthur according to Malory or Tennyson was the tale of The Olde Religion giving way to Christian values, as defined by the chivalric code, a beautiful system whether it ever at any time was implemented by the powers that be. An old adage insists that those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it; like the contemporary collegiate study of ancient Hebrews or Greeks, pursued not merely for curiosity about antiquity but the meaning these fables might generate for ourselves and future generations, the unofficial "study" of *Star Wars* (and the university-level courses about Lucas's oeuvre that have now commenced) implies that we can learn not only from history but also from the legendary modifications of it that accumulated what Umland defines as "mythical truth," a fabricated story, set in what appears to be a historical age, that offers, to borrow from Noel Coward, a design for living: a paradigm for our own actions; a codification of ambitions we ought to follow and what excesses we might avoid so as to not repeat the vain, foolish life-journeys presented in the manner of cautionary fables.[5]

Like the Hebrew Bible, the Greek epics and tragedies, and more recently the classic Westerns, *Star Wars*, at least on one essential level, concerns itself with The Law: the social law of its world and the moral dimension that stands behind any rules of order. Be it the Ten Commandments, the dictates of Aristotle, or the Jedi way, all the groundworks "demand adherence to a code represented by that law"; one defies it—David, Oedipus, Anakin Skywalker—at the threat of creating cosmic chaos that will destroy many, these ultimately including himself. Here is the tragic hero who attempts to defy destiny only to discover that by doing so he only brings about its occurrence.[6] Conversely, there is the epic hero, an innocent swain who believes himself to be of humble origins only to grasp that he secretly is born to the nobility, and who accepts, if only after hesitation, his assigned role by a greater force that governs the universe as the "deliverer," societal and religious, for his people: Moses; Arthur, Davy Crockett at the Alamo, Luke Skywalker. The original *Star Wars* trilogy presents us, then, with an epic; the prequel set of three films offers up the tragedy that necessarily preceded it. Ford, an inspiration for Lucas, was no stranger to trilogies: his famed cavalry films likewise form one.

We can trace the hero-figure as far back as we wish to go, to the Greeks before the walls of Troy, David killing Goliath. Rightly or wrongly, people love heroes, male heroes, and respond to tales about them. Perhaps someday, in a more enlightened age, that will no longer be necessary. For the

time being, this remains true, for better or for worse. No surprise, then, that two of Kurosawa's best regarded Samurai epics, strongly influenced by Westerns, would be remade as examples of that genre—*Seven Samurai* as *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *Yojimbo* as *Fistful of Dollars* (1964)—or that *Magnificent Seven* would transform from horse opera into space opera in the post–*Star Wars* era with *Battle Beyond the Stars* (1980), onetime Western star George Peppard now cast as a character called "Space Cowboy." He is of course Han Solo even as Han was Ringo, *The Gunfighter*. Lorne Greene, who became a major name thanks to TV's long-running *Bonanza* in the late 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, starred in yet another *Wagon Train* in space, *Battlestar: Galactica*, devised by ABC to cash in on the popularity of *Star Wars*. Earlier, Greene released the hit record *Ringo*.

Other critics have noted the similarity; J. P. Telotte commented on "the 'wild west' atmosphere" at the Mos Eisley space port.[7] Lucas in time noted both the relationship of his films to ancient tales and the relatively more recent sagas of our American frontier when he stated that:

> Through anthropology I had gotten interested in folklore and mythology and in their role as an anchor for societies. I came to realize that America has no modern fairy tales. You could say that the Western movie is the last of our myths.[8]

As critic Kevin J. Wetmore pointed out, "Myths serve to define and unite the community."[9] With this in mind, the phrase "cowboys in space" takes on new meaning. Lucas was making the first *Star Wars* even as *Taxi Driver* told audiences that ours was a community lacking any clear definition or unity. People responded to Martin Scorsese's film because they sensed that he was, at least for the moment, correct. Still, they couldn't help but long for both those qualities, which Westerns—"A" or "B" in budget and or/quality, theatrical or televised—had once proffered. We yearned for Western-style heroes even if recent studies as to race and gender made clear that the old frontier had not in truth been a golden age. To go on believing in fairy tales, we would require that someone come along and reset them in an imaginative universe that now defied disbelief if only because we all knew it was only make-believe. George Lucas provided precisely that with *Star Wars*, which has far more in common with epic Westerns than science fiction.

NOTES

1. Robert Jewett, *Saint Paul in the Movies* (Westminster, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 20.

2. Jewett, *Saint Paul*, 20.

3. Will Brooker, *BBC Film Classics: Star Wars* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

4. Rebecca A. Umland, "Connecticut Yankees to Fisher Kings," in *The Arthurian Legend as Hollywood Epic*, ed. Rebecca A. Umland and Samuel J. Umland (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 128.

5. Umland, "Connecticut Yankees," 129.

6. Umland, "Connecticut Yankees," 133.

7. J. P. Telotte, "The Dark Side of the Force: *Star Wars* and the Science Fiction Tradition." *Extrapolation 24*, pp. 216–26, Fall 1983, 221.

8. Quoted in Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., *The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion, and Rebellion in the* Star Wars *Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 87; originally by Alan Arnold.

9. Wetmore, *The Empire Triumphant*, 87.

2

Is *Star Wars* a Modernized Fairy Tale?

Arthur Berger

We must keep in mind that films are narratives. Film is the medium through which stories are told, and many of the most popular films in recent years show the remarkable things that can be done, in terms of special effects and other matters, with this medium. But without a good script, without interesting and exciting stories, without characters with whom we can identify, and without dialogue that sparkles, all the technological know-how in the world leads to very little. If all we can say about a film is that the special effects were wonderful, we've said, in effect, that the film was not worth seeing or making.

There are various kinds of stories told in films. That is, the narratives found in films tend to fall into certain genres: love stories, detective films, spy films, romantic comedies, war stories, adventures, science-fiction and fantasy stories, and so on. At one time there were many western films made, but that genre has fallen out of favor in recent years, though some Westerns are still made. There are also sub-genres found within the genres. Thus, for example, there are many kinds of adventure stories such as police films, kung-fu films, and so on. These genres all have a formulaic dimension to them; that is, they are based on conventions that specify certain kinds of plots, characters, heroes, and villains, among other things. It doesn't matter whether the genre is a detective story, a spy story (as in the James Bond films), or a love story; there are certain things a story has to have to hold an audience's attention. Though all genres are different—though there are some films that mix genres—all stories must have certain things in them to maintain our interest.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FOLKTALE

In 1927, Vladimir Propp, a Russian folklore scholar, wrote *Morphology of the Folktale*, which analyzed a number of Russian folktales in terms of the basic components he found in the tales. He did this because discussions of kinds of plots or basic themes led nowhere; everyone had different classification schemes and none of them were very helpful. The term *morphology* means structure and what Propp did was come up with the structural elements of folktales.

Propp called these components "functions" and described them as representing some kind of an action of a character "defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" (p. 21). He added, "Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale" (p. 21). He also believed that the number of functions was limited. In this book Propp listed and described his thirty-one functions, pointing out that there were often a number of variations of a function.

All stories start with what Propp called an "initial situation," and then there are his thirty-one functions. For example, his first function is: "Absentation: One of the members of a family absents himself from home." He offers three subcategories of this function: first, the person absenting himself can be a member of an older generation; second, the death of parents represents an intensified form of absentation; and third, sometimes members of the younger generation absent themselves. His book describes his basic functions and the variations or subcategories of the functions in considerable detail. Functions also can be reversed or inverted in some cases, he adds, to make things more complicated. His second function is: "An interdiction is addressed to the hero." Other functions involve such things as a hero getting helpers and the use of a magical agent.

Many fairy tales begin with these two functions. For example, the parents of a princess go on a trip (absentation) and tell her not to open the door or look in the trunk or something of that nature (interdiction). Of course, as soon as they have left the princess forgets about the interdiction or pays no attention to it and then the trouble begins. She is poisoned by a witch or abducted by a demon or whatever.

What is interesting is that Propp's functions are also found in contemporary narratives for the simple reason that Propp's functions apply not only to fairy tales but to stories of all kinds. Nowadays we often have to update Propp's functions a bit, but we can use them to analyze contemporary films and other narrative texts in other media. In the chart below I offer simplified versions of Propp's functions. He suggests that all stories have an initial situation in which the characters are introduced. Then he lists and describes his thirty-one functions. An abbreviated list of his functions follows.

Propp's Basic Functions

Initial situation	Members of family or hero are introduced
Absentation	Member(s) of family absents self
Interdiction	An interdiction is given to the hero or heroine
Violation	Interdiction violated
Delivery	Villain gets information about the victim
Trickery	Villain attempts to deceive victim
Complicity	Victim is deceived, helps villain
Villainy	Villain causes harm to member of a family
Lack	Member of a family lacks something
Mediation	Misfortune is made known, hero is dispatched
Departure	Hero leaves home
Receipt	Hero tested by donor, gets magical agent
Transference	Hero led to object of search
Struggle	Hero and villain join in combat
Branding	Hero is branded
Victory	Villain is defeated
Return	The hero returns
Pursuit	The hero is pursued by villain
Difficult task	A difficult task is proposed to the hero
Solution	The task is accomplished
Recognition	The hero is recognized
Exposure	A false hero or villain is exposed
Transfiguration	The hero is given a new appearance
Punishment	The villain is punished
Wedding	The hero is married, ascends the throne

Propp suggested that there are two kinds of heroes: "victim heroes," who suffer from the actions of a villain, and "seeker heroes," who agree to go out in the world and liquidate some "lack" or perform some task demanded of them. The heroes always defeat the villains but the kinds of plots they are involved in differ. Thus, we see different functions for different kinds of heroes, though often their tasks merge and seeker heroes have to defeat villains (dragons, etc.) to accomplish their tasks. Heroes generally need helpers and find donor figures who give them magical agents.

One of the traditional acts of the hero is to help "damsels in distress" or rescue them from villains (or both). In modern stories, it is possible to have an assertive and strong heroine, but generally speaking, the heroes are strong and active and the heroines are weak and passive. A figure such as Princess Leia is a case in point, perhaps an exception to the rule. In *Star Wars* she grabs a blaster, zaps stormtroopers, and shows herself to be a strong person. (This stereotyping of women as weak and needing heroes to help them is changing, as women become directors and make the kinds of films they want to make, but such films still tend to be the exception, not the rule.)

A PROPPIAN ANALYSIS OF STAR WARS

According to Propp, the heroic warrior is courageous, imaginative, and inventive. In addition, he generally has numerous helpers (who often possess great powers) and has the use of a magic agent, which is supplied by a donor figure. (Think here of Obi-Wan Kenobi as a donor figure giving Luke his father's lightsaber, which connects him to "the Force" and confirms Luke as a Jedi warrior.) With his magic agent and his other qualities, the hero generally is able to defeat the villain, who often has greater power and superior numbers. This is what happens, of course, in *Star Wars*.

One thing we learn from Propp is that a hero generally cannot function on his own; he needs others, and though he fights for freedom or to accomplish some task to win the hand of the woman he loves, he is part of something bigger than himself. This is certainly the case in the *Star Wars* epic. Heroes have ties to their communities; villains, on the other hand, tend to be alienated and unloved, even though they may have sexual partners. These villains direct their repressed sexuality into a "lust" for power and domination. Villains often have women who work for them, and may even be their sexual partners, but generally they fear the villain more than they love him, or are attracted by his wealth and power. Villains generally are not young but are middle-aged or older.

Heroes, on the other hand, tend to be young (or youngish) and are often motivated by romantic love—for the heroine. Obviously, a conflict between a young hero and an older villain over a woman has an oedipal dimension to it that we cannot ignore. When the young hero defeats the older villain, the hero can then "marry" the heroine (or, in modern-day stories, have sex with her) and "live happily after" until the next villain appears on the scene.

Let us examine *Star Wars* as a fairy tale. I will show in a highly schematized way that many of the functions discussed by Propp in his study of fairy tales are found in modern stories because, as I pointed out earlier, Propp dealt with the basic components of stories of all kinds, not just Russian fairy tales. *Star Wars* and others in the Lucas epic are full of fairy-tale elements, and it is well known that Lucas was very interested in myths, legends, and related concerns when he was writing the script for the films and making them.

What follows is a list of Propp's functions applied to *Star Wars*. I could easily extend and amplify this list, but I just want to show how easy it is to apply Propp to *Star Wars*.

Proppian Functions in *Star Wars*

Family introduced	We meet Luke Skywalker
Absentation	Luke goes looking for his droid
Interdiction	Luke is warned about straying out in wilds
Violation	Luke stays out too long, involved with Sand People
Delivery	Han Solo's spaceship is bugged
Departure	Luke goes off on mission to save Leia
Villainy	Vader's agents kill Luke's uncle and aunt
Receipt	Luke tested by Obi-Wan, gets Lightsaber
Transference	Luke flies all over looking for Leia
Struggle	Luke and friends fight stormtroopers on Death Star
Pursuit	Luke and friends pursued by ships from Death Star
Difficult task	Luke must drop bomb in little opening on the Death Star
Solution	Death Star explodes
Recognition	Leia gives Luke, Han medals

We can see, then, from these functions, and others that we could have added, that there is a considerable amount of fairy-tale material found in *Star Wars*. That is because, I would suggest, the fairy tale is the prototypical tale, the UR (original) tale, from which other kinds of stories draw sustenance. Propp also discussed "moves" that might best be characterized as sequences of activities that can be repeated in different forms. Each battle scene in *Star Wars* can be seen as a Proppian "move," which means that plots don't necessarily have a straight, linear form but can repeat certain actions or events, in varied ways, over and over again.

ON THE POPULARITY OF *STAR WARS*

Star Wars was incredibly successful: it made something like $500 million dollars in box-office receipts in America. It is an exemplary example of a modernized fairy tale, and as such, it speaks to the psyches of young people and adolescents, who can identify with its young hero, the way fairy tales speak to the psyches of children who read these tales or have them read to them.

Like the typical heroes of fairy tales, Luke Skywalker has helpers and Lucas has created a remarkable and brilliant collection of weird characters, similar to the fantastic creatures found in many fairy tales, to help Luke and to battle Darth Vader and his minions.

In fairy tales, a young man often must battle to rescue a princess from a villainous older man. We learn, in a later film, that Darth Vader is Luke's father, so the oedipal aspects of fairy tales ("Jack the Giant Killer" and so on) are an important subtext of this film. Young males can identify with Luke Skywalker and young women with Princess Leia, deriving great comfort from their struggles and ultimate triumph over the forces of adversity.

In an essay in *Psychoanalytic Review*, Lucia Villela-Minnerly and Richard Markin explain that their analysis of the film

> is based on the assumption that movies are modern myths, fairy tales, and narratives in general are metaphorical attempts to understand and explain the perceived realities of our own selves, our origins, our future, our world. We believe it is often through these creative metaphors that we reach for that which is as yet imperfectly understood and attempt to expand our knowledge of the conscious and unconscious wishes, feats, and conflicts that underlie human dreams and human actions.[1]

This statement is very similar to those made by Bruno Bettelheim in his book *The Uses of Enchantment*. In this book he analyzes a number of fairy tales and shows how they speak to the needs of children and help them gain psychological strength and courage to face the future.

Star Wars was popular, then, because it did such a brilliant job of telling a story that had great meaning to the people who saw it, even though they might not have been able to recognize or articulate what, in particular, it was doing for them. People said they liked it because of the action, because of the wonderful effects, because of the remarkable inventive characters Lucas created, and because of the superb acting in the film.

But more than most films, *Star Wars*, like myths and fairy tales, spoke, in subtle and appealing ways, to those realms of our psyche that we do not generally recognize and cannot access directly, giving us comfort and courage to deal with the problems we all must face. I would suggest that *Star Wars* was (whatever else it might have been) a form of collective therapy—which explains why so many children and adolescents saw it repeatedly. Children often want to hear the same fairy tale over and over because it speaks to needs they have.

In later films in the series, Lucas seems to have lost his voice and many of his later *Star Wars* films became victims to his focus on technology and special effects, without strong stories to support them. Had he read Propp he would have realized that you need a great story to make a great film.

NOTE

1. Lucia Villela-Minnerly and Richard Markin, "*Star Wars* as Myth: A Fourth Hope?" *Psychoanalytic Review* 74, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 387–99.

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3

From Disneyland to Modesto

George Lucas and Walt Disney

Craig Svonkin

The year 1977, when *Star Wars* premiered, also witnessed the release of Walt Disney Productions' *Herbie Goes to Monte Carlo*, *Pete's Dragon*, *The Rescuers*, and *Candleshoe*. That same year, a new meme was introduced into discourse on popular culture: why Disney should be making movies like *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and why George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, or perhaps both as a team ought to be hired to run Disney's film division. Many Disney fans and employees sensed that Lucas was somehow connected to Walt Disney, even if they couldn't put their collective finger on the precise relationship. It would not be until Michael Eisner and Frank Wells assumed management of Walt Disney Productions in September of 1984 that an actual business connection between Disney and Lucas would be forged, resulting in popular Lucas-themed rides and 3-D films, *Captain Eo*, *Star Tours*, and the *Indiana Jones Adventure*, opening at Disneyland and other Disney theme parks around the world.

Renowned film critic Pauline Kael offers some initial insights into the thematic connections between Disney and Lucas. Writing of the Lucas-produced, Spielberg-directed *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), Kael expresses concern at Spielberg's statement that "the real movie-lovers are still children," ironically responding that "there's no doubt he means that in a congratulatory sense."[1] Kael views Lucas as "hooked on the crap of his childhood," a critique that despite its condescension seems accurate, not only about Lucas but also about Spielberg and Lucas and Spielberg's spiritual children John Lasseter of Pixar, Guillermo del Toro, Peter Jackson, and many other contemporary directors. The critique could apply as well to Disney, arguably Lucas and Spielberg's spiritual father. Walt loved to play with toys, building

a studio and Disneyland in order to delight in oversized versions of the sort of toys he desired but was denied as a boy.

Kael argues that if Lucas were to bring "his resources to bear on some projects with human beings in them—there's no imagining the result."[2] Kael is correct that Lucas doesn't focus on human beings in many of his films, not out of fear of the marketplace rejecting such character-focused films, rather due to his "temperament and tastes."[3] As Kael says, "essentially, George Lucas is in the toy business."[4] Lucas himself commented on his love of comics, games, and toys in a 1977 interview: "I like comics and toys . . . there's no doubting that I haven't grown up."[5] Certainly, the same critique could be leveled at Disney, a man whose studio built such toys as the first sound cartoon, the first Technicolor cartoon, the first feature-length animated film made in the United States, and a theme park with a rocket ship to the moon, a number of steam trains, a paddle-wheel steamboat, a fairy-tale castle, robot birds and presidents and pirates, and other toys for the grown-up Walt, and his guests, to play with.

Less fair is Kael's assumption that films inspired by "the crap of . . . childhood," films about nonhumans, and films, rides, and attractions that are also elaborate toys (or films that are rides or attractions, as seems the case with many of Lucas's films), cannot be ideologically, aesthetically, or spiritually interesting. The most living thing in Disney's or Lucas's artistic production may be a nonhuman, whether the robots R2-D2 or C-3PO or the Muppet-like Jedi master Yoda, or a series of dead drawings of a puppet transforming into a living boy that themselves somehow magically come alive, or a sentient Volkswagen, Herbie the Love Bug, or an audio-animatronic dinosaur or bird or pirate. Disney's and Lucas's common interest in humanizing and animating the nonliving—the robot or puppet or drawing—may not be seen as serious or worthy of their artistic talents by some critics such as Kael. Still, the attempt to bring the inanimate to seeming life—to make the automaton or puppet seem to breathe and think—has a long history in the West, with Disney and Lucas part of a lineage with ancestors including Wolfgang von Kempelen, Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin, Georges Méliès, Winsor McCay, and Ray Harryhausen.

Disney's and Lucas's aesthetic practices share a certain simultaneous attraction to technology and nostalgic fixation on the past that could cause an objective observer to conclude that they are paradoxically technophiles and technophobes at the same time. Nostalgic and future-fixated implies a contradiction deserving of analysis. Disneyland's layout, with its nostalgic celebration of the faux-past of idyllic small-town, turn-of-the-twentieth-century American life (Main Street, U.S.A.), the American west (Frontierland), the European fantasy-village representing the visitor's own childhood past (Fantasyland), and the exotic wild (Adventureland), plus its seemingly contradictory fixation on a wondrous future where technol-

ogy would magically cure all societal ills (Tomorrowland), may be the best example of Disney's ideological complexity. Disney's obsession with new technologies in his filmmaking career, and his interest in the new technology of audio-animatronic robots, reveal a keen interest in the future. However, it's interesting to note that Disney often used innovative film technology in the service of creating nostalgic films based on ancient tales or set in a rosy, nostalgic past; likewise, the first uses made of Disney's animatronic technology were the celebration of the colonial past in the Enchanted Tiki Room or the nostalgic recreation of Abraham Lincoln through robotics. Similarly, the most "living" of Lucas's *Star Wars* characters are his robot comedy duo, R2-D2 and C-3PO, and the Jedi master Yoda, a low-tech puppet brilliantly performed by Frank Oz.

Lucas's aesthetics demonstrate an even more conflicted relationship to technophilia and technophobia than Disney's. Martin Kevorkian analyzes Lucas's technophobia, arguing that "[t]he *Star Wars* saga, through Darth Vader, recounts the horror of what happens to the white male body when it is technologized: it is reduced to a black voice, enslaved to the ghastly emperor."[6] Kevorkian reads the trilogy as a primer for anti-corporate technophobia.[7] Kevorkian is largely correct, for Darth Vader, a man turned into frightening machine, the white-shelled, nameless/faceless stormtroopers, and the Death Star, the ultimate technological weapon, able to destroy an entire planet, all point to technophobia. Lucas's emphasis on the Force, a pseudo-Eastern, Buddhist, or New Age–sounding concept of radical interconnectedness, and on the Ewoks, a primitive group of savage Teddy Bear–like creatures who defeat the Empire (and who speak a language that sounds a bit like Cambodian played backward), point to his post-1960s anxieties of American technology and American militarism run amok. The good characters in *Star Wars* prefer natural fabrics—like hippies on some sort of Eastern-philosophy–based commune—whereas evil characters are part machine, like Vader and General Grievous. They wear plastic or metal or other cold, artificial materials. In this way, Lucas seems more wary of technology than Disney, whose faith in technology had its ultimate example in his late, unfinished plans to build the ultimate technological utopian community, EPCOT, his Experimental Community of Tomorrow.

Lucas's anxieties about technology and the future can also be seen in the way he creates a "future" that is inherently nostalgic. *Star Wars* takes place, according to the film's opening crawl, "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, . . ." which places the *Star Wars* universe in a realm directly adjacent to the fairy tale. Other signs of Lucas's nostalgia are his inclusion of a princess in need of saving, a boy on a quest, and a wise old man who offers the boy a magical sword-like talisman to help him on his quest. Lucas also includes nostalgic filmic forms in *Star Wars*: the villain in black and hero in white from old Westerns, robot-sidekicks who serve as Laurel-and-Hardy–type

comic relief, and images, characters, and motifs reminiscent of scenes from *The Wizard of Oz*, *Pinocchio*, and *Casablanca*. But Lucas also evidences technophilia, demonstrating a love of robots in his humanistic depiction of R2-D2 and C-3PO (arguably the most appealing, "live" characters in the film), and a love of hot rods, fast bikes, and fighter planes in various racing scenes. Lucas also demonstrates a love of technology in the many new technologies his special effects team brought to the filmmaking process itself.

Lucas was influenced in both his technophobia and technophilia by Walt and the Disney Company, even by such post–Walt Disney films as *The Love Bug* from 1968, which imagined a sentient, sentimental, lovable, feisty Volkswagen—well before Lucas realized R2-D2, a sentient, sentimental, lovable, feisty robot. Other elements seem influenced by Disney films and Disneyland. The Ewoks appear to be Lucas's mashing together of cute Disney stuffed animal creatures and Cambodian guerilla fighters. Many of *Star Wars*' iconic scenes, including the Death Star space battles and Endor speeder bike sequences, seem like Lucas's attempts to borrow from Disneyland rides, as well as war films, drag race flicks, and Saturday afternoon adventure serials. The kinetic nature of Lucas's films, with fast cuts and vehicle races, could have been inspired by Disneyland the park, with its various vehicles in motion: trains, steamboats, canoes, monorails, people movers, bobsleds, and so on. Disneyland's immersive "lands" may have also been responsible for Lucas's interest in creating distinct, encompassing worlds in *Star Wars*. The Lucas family's annual trip to Disneyland, which opened when George was eleven years old (a formative age), undoubtedly made a large impression. As he recalls, "I loved Disneyland. . . . I wandered around; I'd go on the rides and the bumper cars, the steamboats, the shooting galleries, the jungle rides. I was in heaven."[8]

Lucas often spoke of *Star Wars* in interviews as his attempt to make a Disney-style children's film: "I decided I wanted to make a children's movie, to go the Disney route."[9] He told Stephen Zito that he envisioned the audience for *Star Wars* to be "fourteen and maybe even younger than that."[10] Lucas described his goal as wanting "to do a modern fairy tale, a myth" set "in an exotic, faraway land."[11] However, he found that our world's fairy-tale locations have disappeared: "We no longer have the Mysterious East or treasure islands or going on strange adventures."[12] So, instead, Lucas created a new Adventureland in space, that "bigger, mysterious world in space that is more interesting than anything around here."[13]

Lucas's description of *Star Wars* as an Adventureland in space seems evocative of Disney's description of Disneyland as found on the park's welcome plaque; Disney promised nostalgia and future-hopes to his guests, who could relive "fond memories of the past" and "savor the challenge and promise of the future."[14] It was as if Lucas were attempting to combine the thematic elements found in Adventureland and Tomorrowland.

The uninstalled plaque written for Adventureland reads, in part, "Here is adventure. Here is romance. Here is mystery," whereas the Tomorrowland plaque reads: "Tomorrowland: A vista into a world of wondrous ideas. . . . Tomorrow offers new frontiers in science, adventure, and ideals."[15] In a 1980 interview, Lucas revealed that his then wife Marcia said he "either live[d] in the past or in the future, never in the present."[16]

Lucas's double-view parallels Disney's simultaneous nostalgia and futurism. As I have earlier stated, "Both nostalgia and utopianism . . . show evidence of a desire for transcendence, as well as an existential anxiety concerning mortality and the present. For the person . . . fixated on the past and the future, it is the present and the ineluctable reality of mortality that is the problem."[17] Disney's and Lucas's interest in bringing the inanimate to life, in automatons, robots, animation, and the simulation of life, may derive from these anxieties, although this desire to see the automaton live is a vivid desire for many. Kael's critique of Lucas for being interested in toys ignores this wish, to use Victoria Nelson's terms, to view a seemingly lifeless object or modern electrical puppet come alive in a way that may seem more "alive" than a human actor.[18]

While Lucas spoke of *Star Wars* as his Disneyesque children's film, he also wanted to be taken seriously as a director. Thus his references to Disney weren't always positive. At times he used Disney as a marker for failure, as a form of self-flagellation. After a particularly troubling screening of a rough cut of *Star Wars*, Lucas kept repeating, "Only kids—I've made a Walt Disney movie, a cross between *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Computer Wore Tennis Shoes*. It's gonna do maybe eight, ten million."[19] Lucas felt some degree of anxiety of Disney influence, to rework Harold Bloom's concept a tad. Lucas's anxiety, however, was not founded on what Bloom considered the author's anxiety that he was sitting in the shadow of a greater artist. Rather, Lucas may have felt anxiety about being associated with Disney because Walt Disney Productions was at its commercial and critical nadir as a studio in the late 1970s, and because his director friends thought he should be making serious, important films.

Lucas, like Spielberg, was torn between these two attractions—being a successful box-office director/producer, and being considered important, serious, even avant-garde. As Peter Biskind tells it, "Lucas wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, be paid the kind of attention the critics lavished on Coppola and Scorsese."[20] He once compared his own *American Graffiti* to Fellini's *I Vitelloni*.[21] Pressure from director friends added to these anxieties: "When Lucas finished a draft [of *Star Wars*], he would show it to his friends. . . . No one was supportive." Lucas recalled them telling him, "George, you should be making more of an artistic statement."[22] This desire to be considered a serious artist rather than a director and producer of blockbusters has remained with Lucas, witnessed in his recurring talk of again making "a more abstract kind

of movie, without characters and without plots," as he did in his USC Film School days.[23] While Lucas demonstrated an anxiety about Disney influence early in his filmmaking career, he also acknowledged his debt. Lucas was and is nothing if not true to his aesthetic desire to make revisionary new versions of the sorts of Flash Gordon, Edgar Rice Burroughs, pulp adventure serials he watched as a boy on his favorite childhood television show, *Adventure Theater*.[24] Lucas wanted to make films that played with his nostalgic memories, not art films on the order of those his friends Scorsese and Coppola were turning out.

In the 1980s George Lucas came to terms with his connections to Disney—the man, the producer, the studio—and the many influences of Disney on his own creative output. In a number of interesting ways Lucas's persona, filmmaking style, and business and marketing practices paralleled Walt's. Certainly, there were dramatic differences between the two; Lucas still aspired to be considered an intellectual filmmaker, even into the 1980s and 1990s when he had become a major movie mogul, whereas Disney never thought of himself in what might be considered a pretentious manner, even if early on some critics did view him thusly. Nonetheless, the similarities between the two are important. Disney and Lucas both were raised in small towns. Both viewed themselves as Hollywood outsiders, disrespected and abused by mainstream studios. Both took on derided entertainment genres and re-created them as huge, popular successes: Disney with the animated film and with the amusement park, Lucas with the pulp space operas or adventure serials. Both were depicted and marketed as creative geniuses while each viewed mainstream Hollywood studios as the enemy rather than potential allies.

One key parallel was a common interest in owning and controlling their work, a desire for control so extreme that each filmmaker arguably felt characters and ideas created long before their birth should be stamped with their creative name, and that their own names should become the sole names widely associated with any products. Where Walt appropriated European fairy tales, making them his own and stamping them as Disney creations, Lucas achieved something similar. Where Disney attempted to turn the Disney name into a powerful, iconic brand, Lucas did the same. Where Disney created a filmmaking kingdom for himself where he was the benevolent (or at times not-so-benevolent) dictator, Lucas did likewise.

While Lucas may have learned his habit of control from his careful biological father or the negative example of his friend and mentor Francis Ford Coppola, it is also possible that he studied Walt, a well-known control freak, incorporating some of Disney's controlling practices. However, Lucas's and Disney's common interest in maintaining control over products, their personae, and filmmaking worlds may be attributable to similar formative experiences of conflict and betrayal. Walt often spoke of

the important and painful lesson he learned when producer Charles Mintz signed his animators out from under him and took possession of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, a character Disney mistakenly thought he owned. Disney would speak of the lessons he learned: that "you had to be careful whom you trusted[,] that you had to control what you had or it would be taken from you[, and] how duplicitous the business world could be."[25] Lucas likewise spoke of painful formative experiences.

In the authorized documentary *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy* (2004), Lucas speaks of his first two filmmaking experiences with studios as life lessons: "My first film they [the studio] didn't understand and they meddled with it after it was all finished. Same thing with my second film. The corporate entity came in and jerry-rigged it—cut five minutes out."[26] Lucas's use of the term "corporate entity" in reference to the studio is interesting given its similarity to his filmic depiction of the evil Empire in *Star Wars*—a faceless, bureaucratic power lacking humanity or empathy. In an interview about working with Hollywood studios on *THX 1138* and *American Graffiti*, Lucas's anger and distrust are clear: "They're rather sleazy, unscrupulous people. L.A. is where they make deals, do business in the class corporate way, which is screw everybody. . . . They're not filmmakers. I don't want to have anything to do with them."[27] Lucas's response to his encounter with the "corporate entity" was to run, but also to learn similar lessons to those Disney had earlier learned: "I came up [to San Francisco and Zoetrope studios] with no intention of actually becoming successful, but I did have a very strong feeling about being able to be in control of my work."[28]

Walt was infamous among his employees for his will to control, a facet of his personality that, unlike such "un-Disney-like" practices as his chain-smoking, tendency to curse, fondness for an evening drink, and unpredictable temper, made it into the studio's creation and marketing of the Walt Disney myth. As Michael Barrier states, "Disney was . . . absolute ruler of his studio."[29] Longtime Disney story man Joe Grant, a powerful creative force and head of the studio's influential, deceptively titled Character Model Department from 1937 to 1949, explained, "There was only one authority at the studio: Walt. That was the final signature on everything."[30] Similarly, editor Walter Murch believed that Lucas's success and his obsession with Lucasfilm wound "him tighter and tighter into a workaholic control-driven person."[31]

Walt's controlling tendencies also affected the marketing of the Disney films, with the Walt Disney name being the only name that Walt wanted the public to know. Disney began this practice early on; he changed the name of the studio from the Disney Brothers Studio to the Walt Disney Studio, thereby making clear to his brother Roy and the world which Disney brother was in charge.[32] Whether Disney's desire to market only his

name and persona came out of his savvy business and marketing sense or was related to his ego, it became a central part of his practice. Walt wanted everyone on staff to call him by his first name but also to know that his was the name that counted. If they wanted their own names widely known, they were at the wrong studio. "'There's just one thing we're selling here,' [Walt Disney] told [Disney artist] Ken Anderson, . . . 'and that's the name 'Walt Disney.' If you can buy that and be happy to work for it, you're my man. But if you've got any ideas of selling the name 'Ken Anderson,' it's best for you to leave right now.'"[33] Walt's unwillingness to give his thousands of artists adequate credit for their creative contributions may have led to the Disney animators' strike of 1941: "[T]he staff now began to voice another raw grievance: Walt never gave them credit."[34] One Disney artist complained of Walt, "He's a genius at using someone else's genius."[35] While that opinion was undoubtedly unfair to Disney, a brilliant story man himself, it does reveal the damage done to the studio and bad feelings created by Disney's unwillingness to share credit and compliment his artists.

Many of Disney's most talented employees, from Art Babbitt to Joe Grant to Bill Peet, were driven out, fired, or quit; the strongest personalities were usually the first to go. Lucas likewise had difficulty working with his longtime collaborators. Delays and cost overruns on *The Empire Strikes Back* broke Lucas's longtime relationship with film school friend, producer Gary Kurtz.[36] After *Empire*, Kurtz never worked with Lucas again. The declining quality of *Return of the Jedi* and the *Star Wars* prequels when compared to *Empire* may have been results of Lucas's difficulties in working with strong writers or artists. Marcia Lucas, George's ex-wife, a film editor and an important creative colleague early on, indicated that George was far too sparing with compliments: "He never felt that I had any talent, he never felt I was very smart, he never gave me much credit."[37] John Milius likewise thought that Lucas became insular and surrounded by yes-men once *Star Wars* hit big.[38]

Disney often spoke of "his" Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Alice in Wonderland, Mary Poppins, and Peter Pan, evidently forgetting that these were either folktale figures created by oral storytellers hundreds of years earlier or characters created by authors such as Charles Dodgson, P. L. Travers, and J. M. Barrie. Disney television writer Charles Shows describes Walt's idea for an opening to an episode of *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* titled "Disneyland Goes to the World's Fair": "How about opening with a long shot of the New York World's Fair grounds. . . . I get out of the chopper, followed by all of my cartoon characters, like Snow White, Peter Pan, Little Red Riding Hood, the Big Bad Wolf. . . ."[39] Shows's comment on Disney's appropriation of these characters is interesting: "It was obvious that Walt considered every cartoon character he had ever filmed as his own personal creation. It didn't seem to bother Walt one bit that many of 'his' characters

had been created hundreds of years before he was born!"[40] Likewise, Lucas could appropriate the creative work of others and market the results as his sole creation. Kael makes just this argument concerning the Lucas-imagined and produced film *Willow* (1998), about which she quotes Lucas as saying, "It's a pure fantasy film that came out of my psyche."[41] Of Lucas's claim to be the sole creator, Kael states:

> Maybe only a movie mogul can believe that he's the source of the world's treasury of legends and movies. If you took Bible stories and *Peter Pan* and *Robin Hood* and the *Oz* books and the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales and *Gulliver's Travels* and *Lord of the Rings* and *Ran* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (and the *Star Wars* trilogy) and put them in a hopper and spun it around until it was a whirring mess of porridge, you'd have the mythical-medieval *Willow*, or something close to it.[42]

While Disney and Lucas may have had a common will-to-control, exacerbated by the inevitable isolation caused by their success, their desire for control was not entirely negative. Major creative artists have, as a result of their impulse to create, some desire to control their creative product and creative surroundings. In more solitary creative arts, such as writing an essay few may read, this will-to-control may not cause creative tensions. It is only for creators working in more communal art forms, such as films or theme parks, that the will-to-control their artistic production, their persona, or their creative process can become problematic, divisive, or even destructive.

NOTES

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27. Vallely, "*The Empire Strikes Back*," 93.
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29. Michael Barrier, *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 197.
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4

May the Myth Be with You, Always

Archetypes, Mythic Elements, and Aspects of Joseph Campbell's Heroic Monomyth in the Original *Star Wars* Trilogy

Leah Deyneka

> *Star Wars* came out and we went to school the next day unable to explain to our friends how everything was different now.[1]
>
> Science Fiction and Fantasy are our New Mythology, and provide an important canvas that allows us to explore society's issues. The Journeys may propose the dangers we could face if an "evil" continued—e.g.; nuclear power, genetic engineering, and technology. These journeys may represent our society's phobias in a given era; but they may also present our hopes of a utopian world in which we have overcome a contemporary issue, or simply celebrate our humanity.[2]

Let me set the scene . . . 1977, a darkened theater saturated by the intoxicating aroma of popcorn and jujyfruits, an audience on tenterhooks falls to a hush as the words "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . ." flickers from the projector. Then with an emphatic crescendo of music the *Star Wars* logo bursts on the screen and transforms the cinematic paradigm forever. How could a young filmmaker from Modesto, California, alter the course of film history? The riotous political atmosphere of the 1970s left Americans disillusioned with the government, downtrodden by the war in Vietnam, scandalized by Watergate, and suffocated by the stalled economy. What Americans needed was *A New Hope.*

According to mythologist Joseph Campbell, "it has always been the prime function of mythology to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back."[3] It is fitting that *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* influenced George Lucas as he penned the *Star Wars* saga, and Campbell became a mentor and friend to the filmmaker later in life. If it truly is the

"artist who communicates myth for today," it is the audience that creates the connections and participates with the poet or, in this case, the filmmaker influencing and shaping the myth and giving it meaning through participation.[4]

When creating *Star Wars* George Lucas drew on the antediluvian theme of good vs. evil and the modern theme of humanity vs. machine to capture the imagination of millions and ignite a film frenzy that has never been equaled. Although the main heroic focus of the *Star Wars* films is Luke Skywalker's journey to redeem his fallen father, vanquish the Sith, and restore balance to the Force, the saga is not a journey of one hero but of many who transform throughout the narrative. According to Campbell's book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, we can summarize the hero's journey into three main stages: *The Departure*, *The Initiation*, and *The Return*. The *Star Wars* saga follows the tenets of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey but is not limited to the constraints of this mythological formula. Instead Lucas incorporates aspects of ancient mythology, fairy tales, and modern genre themes to create a unique Universe that speaks to the contemporary viewer. Lucas as creator, writer, and director gave audiences a vibrant, action-packed space adventure combining ancient archetypes, mythic elements, aspects of Joseph Campbell's heroic monomyth, and fantasy tropes to actualize his own multimedia mythology for our modern world.

THE HEROIC JOURNEY: THE DEPARTURE

A New Hope

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.
>
> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*[5]

> Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi; you're my only hope.
>
> George Lucas, *Star Wars: A New Hope*

"The first stage of the mythological journey signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown."[6] In mythology and fairy tales alike, it is the Princess abducted by the Dragon that sets the young hero on his quest; this is the "call to adventure."[7] In the modernization of this trope, Princess Leia, leader of the Rebellion and hero in her own right, is captured by the sepulchral-voiced Darth Vader. Thankfully Leia is not relegated to

the mere role of damsel in distress throughout the saga but represents a stark contrast to the uniformed, masked, sterile technology of the Empire. The battle between the Empire and the Rebellion is not simply good vs. evil but also humanity vs. technology: "will we live for the machine or will we live for humanity."[8] Leia's plea to Obi-Wan Kenobi is responsible for bringing Luke and ultimately herself to the hero's journey that will culminate in both siblings finding their destiny.

Leia's herald in the form of feisty droid R2-D2 and his mannered companion C-3PO end up sold to Owen Lars, moisture farmer and guardian of Luke Skywalker. Luke, like many mythic heroes, is the child of difficult circumstances and unbeknownst royal lineage who has been secreted away to live a humble existence in the wilderness, or in his case, stranded on the arid planet of Tatooine, far from adventure. Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru serve as Luke's first threshold guardians; though benign, their dismissive treatment, restrictions, and fear of Luke's true nature keep him fettered to the corporeal world and are the first obstacle he must overcome before he can truly answer the call.

In medieval epics and sagas the errant knight follows a mysterious creature into the enchanted forest where he transcends the material plane and enters the realm of the Fae, where danger, love, and adventure await him. R2-D2 acts as the herald, drawing Luke into the Jundland Wastes and ultimately into the quest that will define him. As with many characters in the *Star Wars* saga, R2-D2 and C-3PO also undergo a transformation through the original trilogy in particular. Not just simple jesters in the classic form of Abbott and Costello or Laurel and Hardy, the droids function as a Greek chorus, observing the action, participating in it as well as commenting on it from the sidelines. R2-D2 and C-3PO are the characters that we are first introduced to and as viewers we can identify with their fear, bewilderment, and heroics in the face of daunting adversity. As viewers we also identify with their good-natured ribbing in the midst of chaotic situations and their unwavering loyalty to one another. Although they are droids, it is their humanity that we identify with.

The first step into adventure is not an easy one; malicious threshold guardians in the form of Tusken Raiders (also known as Sand People) overwhelm Luke and the droids. Supernatural aid comes in the form of Obi-Wan Kenobi (or Ben Kenobi); he fulfills the role of mentor to our young hero. "The first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass."[9] Obi-Wan is referred to as a "wizard," "hermit," and "crazy old man," throughout the film and his appearance echoes that of classic characters from myth and legend, Merlin in particular, yet his tragic exile also reminds us of Oedipus Rex. Obi-Wan not only saves Luke's life; he opens his eyes to his own heritage,

dismissing the well-cultivated lies that Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru have told the youth in order to keep him from the Dark Side of the Force and perhaps his own nature.

The talisman that Obi-Wan offers to Luke is his father Anakin Skywalker's lightsaber. "This is the weapon of a Jedi Knight. Not as clumsy or random as a blaster; an elegant weapon for a more civilized age. For over a thousand generations, the Jedi Knights were the guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic. Before the dark times . . . before the Empire."[10] Obi-Wan introduces Luke to a whole new world of possibilities and attempts to entreat him to cross the threshold into adventure; Princess Leia's message is revealed and with it Luke's destiny is laid out before him. The Death Star plans hidden in R2-D2 must be brought to Alderaan where they will be used to defeat the Empire, but as with most heroes, Luke is reluctant to answer this call.

"Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests"; this moment is dubbed by Campbell as the "refusal of the call."[11] "I can't get involved! I've got work to do" is Luke's excuse; even though he professes his disdain for the Empire and would like nothing more than to help Princess Leia in her hour of need he refuses Obi-Wan's invitation. Of course, destiny will not be ignored. Luke returns to the Lars homestead to find that his home has been destroyed and his foster parents killed by Imperial troops. With this sobering knowledge in hand, Luke returns to Obi-Wan and accepts the call to adventure.

"With the personification of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown and danger."[12] Obi-Wan exhibits a rather impressive power of suggestion over stormtrooper threshold guardians at the entrance to the spaceport, commenting "the Force can have a strong influence on the weak-minded."[13] In another example of humanity vs. technology, the stormtroopers evoke fear in the audience upon their first introduction blasting onto the Tantive IV, rebel blockade runner, at the beginning of *A New Hope*. The fact that their name comes from the Sturmabteilung, who were military troops in the Nazi party, certainly sets up the Empire as an evil force to be reckoned with at the onset of the series. The sterile, lifeless, and uniform look of the Empire garbed in white, grey, black, and red, like Hitler's troops, is in stark contrast to the vital, imaginative, and diverse appearance of the Rebellion, which is peopled by a ragtag group of rebels including women and aliens.

Mos Eisley spaceport represents both danger and opportunity for Luke; although it is a "hive of scum and villainy" it is also where he will find transport off of his home world as well as a pair of unlikely partners who

will enrich his quest and become heroes themselves. Chalmun's Cantina is peopled by the strangest assortment of characters Luke, not to mention the audience, has ever seen; some are benevolent while others are belligerent. Luke's run-in with Aqualish mercenary Ponda Baba ends with Obi-Wan brandishing his lightsaber for the first time, one quick strike and Baba's arm is left on the ground. The companions have crossed a threshold into danger and marshal law; like the old west, Mos Eisley spaceport is governed by the will of the gun or in this case the blaster and lightsaber. It is appropriate that in this setting Luke and Obi-Wan encounter their next set of hero partners, Han Solo and his Wookiee companion Chewbacca.

Han's first mate, the hulking Wookiee Chewbacca, like many helpful animals in fairy tales and myths, becomes a loyal and fierce advocate for the Rebellion. Han Solo, whose name itself means out for himself, is a pirate and smuggler, more western outlaw than hero; at the onset of the first film he is boastful, sarcastic, self-centered, and ruthless. Han's attire is a modern twist on the cowboy, with blaster at his side and confidence in his swagger. Throughout the journey Han must undergo a transformation as vital as Luke's; in the screenplay for *A New Hope* Han is described as "a loner who realizes the importance of being part of a group and helping for the common good."[14] The arrival of Obi-Wan and Luke unwittingly is Han's call to adventure; the first threshold guardian on his quest is Greedo, a bounty hunter sent by the odious Jabba the Hutt to collect on a debt. Han dispenses with Greedo old west style, blithely commenting "sorry about the mess" as he tosses a coin to the bartender. Han will transform from outsider to important member of the Alliance and will come to fit the archetype of the warrior/lover in the *Star Wars* Universe.

After they blast their way out of Mos Eisley on Han's ship the *Millennium Falcon*, Obi-Wan begins training Luke in the way of the Force. "The Force is what gives the Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together," Obi-Wan explains.[15] As Obi-Wan instructs Luke, Han snickers "hokey religions and ancient weapons are no match for a good blaster at your side, kid," ever the practical materialist.[16] Luke's path is one of spirituality; he must accept the doctrines of the Force to clear his mind of fear and doubt and embrace the calm intuitive faith of the teachings. The Force is a conglomeration of beliefs that viewers of any religious background can associate with, a faith in a higher purpose or energy that cuts across dogma by incorporating Western and Eastern spirituality.

When the heroes come out of hyperspace near Alderaan, they discover that the planet has been destroyed by the Death Star. The Death Star pulls the *Millennium Falcon* into its hollow belly of labyrinthine technology, full of winding corridors, passages, and dead ends. The labyrinth in classical mythology and fairy tales represents a challenging journey fraught with

danger and twists and turns. Classically the labyrinth includes a monster and a maiden; in *Star Wars* the "dragon" is the Death Star, the black knight, Darth Vader, and the maiden (although not a typical damsel in distress by any means) is Princess Leia. At first Han is reluctant to join Luke in saving the Princess—until his greed is appealed to that is. The heroes don the disguise of stormtroopers using this shapeshifting power of classic myth to penetrate the detention cell where the Princess is.

Upon finding Leia, it is worth noting that she is in the classic sleeping beauty pose associated with usual princesses in peril. The similarities with fainting damsels of old end there. Leia levels Luke with a look of disdain, asking, "Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?"[17] According to Lucas, "I wanted to have a princess but I didn't want her to be a passive damsel in distress"; without a doubt Princess Leia is tough, resourceful, courageous, and assertive. She does not break when confronted by Darth Vader's interrogation, the Grand Moff Tarkin's intimidation, or even the destruction of her home world. Leia's heroic journey is in no way undermined by that of the male heroes in the *Star Wars* saga. As part of Leia's transformation she will come to represent the mythic figure of the earth mother, marrying her thorny sarcasm with a more feminine and maternal wisdom by the end of *Return of the Jedi*. Leia's star-crossed love affair with Han Solo will also inform his transformation from mere mercenary to self-sacrificing hero.[18]

Leia instantly takes control of her own jail-break and blasts the heroes an escape route that actually plummets them into a trash compactor, further into the belly of the whale. To Joseph Campbell, within the belly of the whale "the hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died."[19] Luke is nearly drowned by the menacing tentacle of a dianoga while in the compactor and just as things seem to be at their worst, the walls of the trash compactor begin to close in. Like Theseus, Luke is not without "magical aid"; his comlink to C-3PO represents the thread that leads them safely out of the compactor and aids them in navigating the remainder of the labyrinth.

Emerging from the slime of the trash compactor serves as a sort of rebirth for our team of companions. Although the modern courtly banter between Han and Leia continues, Han takes the first step in realizing his position as a hero when he and Chewbacca charge after a group of stormtroopers so that Luke and Leia can escape; this is Han's first truly selfless act and Princess Leia certainly takes note. Upon reaching the hangar that holds the *Millennium Falcon*, Luke faces yet another tragic experience along his journey, the death of his mentor Obi-Wan Kenobi at the hand of Darth Vader. Obi-Wan sacrifices himself so that Luke and the others can escape, but he is also aware that he has taken Luke as far as he can as a mentor; he has brought him across the threshold, given him a talisman to aid him on his

quest, and taught him the ways of the Force. Obi-Wan is also aware that his "death" will allow him to transcend the corporeal world and ascend to the spirit world where he can influence Luke and become a part of his subconscious: "You can't win, Darth. If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you could possibly imagine."[20]

After rescuing Princess Leia, escaping the Death Star, and destroying the pursuing Imperial forces, the heroes must focus on the main task of annihilating the "dragon" and freeing the galaxy of the Empire's most heinous weapon. The Empire's fatal flaw is not recognizing the importance of the individual; as General Dodonna puts it, "the Empire doesn't consider a small one-man fighter to be any threat"; this will be their undoing.[21] Although the Rebellion utilizes technology in their battle against the Empire, ultimately it is Luke's humanity, choosing faith in the Force by turning his navigation computer off, trusting in the words of his mentor and believing in his own intuition that saves the day. Likewise, Han Solo must trust in the importance of the Rebellion and sacrifice his personal safety in order to sweep in at the last minute and save Luke during the climactic final attack run on the Death Star. Han has taken his first step toward transformation and joined the Alliance. As *A New Hope* ends, the heroes are rewarded for their bravery; but their journey has just begun, for the next step in their adventure will be an unending road of trials.

THE HEROIC JOURNEY: INITIATION

The Empire Strikes Back

> Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into the region.[22]
>
> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

> Beware of the Dark Side. Anger, fear, aggression; the Dark Side of the Force are they. Easily they flow, quick to join you in a fight. If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny, consume you it will, as it did Obi-Wan's apprentice.[23]
>
> George Lucas, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

At the opening of *The Empire Strikes Back*, the Rebellion is stationed on Hoth; a desolate icy planet in stark contrast to the lush tropical Rebel base on Yavin 4 from *A New Hope*, this freezing landscape will echo the

dark night of the soul each of the characters will experience in the second installment of the original trilogy. The hunt is on as the film begins and the rebels are on the run from the Empire, holed up at Echo Base on Hoth. Luke, now a Commander in the Alliance, is out scouting for Imperial probe droids when a Wampa attacks and drags him to its lair. Luke uses the Force to retrieve his lightsaber and kill the creature but then faces the task of navigating the snowy wasteland at night without protection; eventually he collapses out of exhaustion. Obi-Wan appears to Luke as a herald in his time of need and calls him to adventure once again, this time entreating him to "go to the Dagobah system. . . . There you will learn from Yoda, the Jedi Master who instructed me," just as Han arrives to save him.[24]

Upon returning to Echo Base, the rebels must evacuate after an Imperial attack; this attack clearly shows the dichotomy of Rebellion vs. Imperial leadership. Vader rules literally with an iron fist; Force choking any of his underlings who fail him, he has become more machine than man and seems to have left his humanity behind. The Rebellion, on the other hand, is ruled with compassion and teamwork; Leia stands at the center of her troops, on their level, and dispenses instructions. Leia is in the trenches with her troops, sharing in their danger and triumph, while Vader controls his troops with fear and intimidation. Once again the organic humanity of the Rebellion is in stark contrast to the sterile inhumanity of the Empire.

Although Han is planning to leave the Rebellion to pay back his debt to Jabba the Hutt, he has transformed from the self-centered scoundrel in the first film into a hero of the Rebellion. Of course, he still trades insults with Leia, their modern courtly way of flirting, but he is the first person to race into danger and rescue Luke, as well as risk his life to see that Leia escapes the base. According to classic tropes the hero must earn the maiden and Han has exhibited great bravery, saved the princess from certain death, and joined a greater cause. Han and Leia have their own call to adventure upon evacuating Hoth; although their adventure is full of peril, betrayal, and tragedy it is also the journey that brings them together as hero and goddess in mystical marriage. According to Campbell, "the ultimate adventure, when all barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World . . . within the darkness of the deepest chamber of the heart."[25] On the run from the Empire and hiding in an asteroid field, their love blossoms and even from within the dark pit of the space slug's belly they are able to pass the threshold of love and begin a spiritual and emotional transformation.

Luke follows Obi-Wan's instruction and travels to the remote planet of Dagobah to begin training with Yoda. The enchanted forest or sacred grove figures frequently in fairy tales and myths; trees are believed to hold special powers and forests symbolize mastery and transformation. Luke's x-wing

fighter is submerged in the swamp and eventually sinks completely; even R2-D2 ends up swallowed by an unseen creature beneath the bog waters, but because Dagobah is a sanctuary of nature, the droid is spat out unceremoniously. On Dagobah Luke must face his weaknesses; his recklessness and impatience endanger his first meeting with Yoda and place his Jedi training in jeopardy.

Luke describes Dagobah "like something out of a dream," which is fitting as he has crossed the threshold into a spiritual plane ruled by the Force. Forests can also represent the unconscious, where deep secrets can be hidden and discovered. Yoda appears in the guise of a trickster at first, concealing his identity from Luke in order to test his Jedi potential; it is only with the assistance of Obi-Wan that Yoda agrees to take Luke on as a pupil. Luke begins his training, but Yoda always reminds him that his impatience and anger will be his undoing. Yoda presents his pupil with the tree cave, a place "strong with the Dark Side of the Force," and entreats him to enter without his weapon.[26] Luke does not yet trust in the Force so he chooses to take his lightsaber with him; in the cave he is confronted with the dark shadow side of himself in the guise of Darth Vader. Although Luke vanquishes the image of Darth Vader he is confronted with an even greater fear: beneath the shadow's mask lies his own face; the Dark Side of the Force lies within him as well as without.

As Luke continues his training on Dagobah, Han and Leia elude the Imperial forces and head toward Bespin in hopes of hiding in the Cloud City with Han's old friend and gambling partner Lando Calrissian. The Cloud City itself is a vision of beauty, but underneath the serene guise of tranquility lurks a serpent in the form of betrayal. The *Millennium Falcon* has been trailed to the Cloud City by bounty hunter Boba Fett and Darth Vader has offered Lando a deal if he turns Han, Leia, and Chewbacca over to the Empire. Lando is a shapeshifting betrayer but he also has the capacity to learn from his mistakes and although he delivers Han and Leia to Vader, he is set upon a path of redemption and heroic transformation that will see fruition in *Return of the Jedi*. Both Han and Chewbacca endure torture and trials at the hands of Vader, but the true reason for their torment is to lead Luke into a trap.

On Dagobah, Luke experiences a vision of the future, a future in which Leia and Han are in peril on Bespin. After this vision he vows to help them; this temptation away from his Jedi training is a pivotal moment for Luke. Should he choose to finish his training his friends may die, but if he abandons his training he may fall to the Dark Side and all will be lost. Ruled by his emotions, loyalty, and reckless nature Luke leaves Dagobah, promising to return and complete his training once he has saved his friends.

Vader decides to test out his carbonite trap for Luke on Han. Leia is able to voice her love for Han just before he is lowered into the pit, and

even when faced with possible death Han acknowledges her love with his disarming reply of "I know." Han survives the traumatic procedure and is frozen alive in carbonite; he is then given to Boba Fett to deliver to Jabba the Hutt. His rescue will be the first call to adventure in *Return of the Jedi*. Lando takes his first step toward redemption and attempts to make amends for his crimes by turning the tables on the Empire and helping Leia and Chewbacca escape from Vader's clutches.

Luke arrives too late to save Han or Leia but instead descends into the underworld of the labyrinthine Cloud City to face Darth Vader. In this battle, Luke faces a revelation that will shake him to the very core of his being. While dueling with Darth Vader, Vader reveals that he is his father; "he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but of one flesh."[27] During the fight, Vader disarms Luke, literally dismembering him; this mark of Cain will figure prominently in *Return of the Jedi* as well as the prequels and ironically will inspire Luke to spare his father's life in their final battle and bring about his redemption. Rather than cave to the lure of the Dark Side Luke leaps to what could certainly be his death. This fall is both literal and figurative as it also symbolizes Luke's fall from innocence and his transition to adulthood.

As Luke hangs suspended in the air underneath the Cloud City, he intuitively uses the Force to call out to Leia. Leia answers the call and turns the *Millennium Falcon* around to save him. Leia has undergone a transition through the perils of her adventure and it is her love for Han and Luke that links her to the Force, even before her identity as Luke's sister and the heir to the prophecy is revealed. Vader continues to reach out to Luke with the Force and at this point Luke must accept the truth that he is indeed his father, that the shadow figure of his nightmares is actually a part of him. This realization and acceptance of Darth Vader as his father sets Luke on the path to his final journey of redemption and reconciliation that will restore balance to the Force.

THE HEROIC JOURNEY: THE RETURN

Return of the Jedi

> The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being. The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands and the two are atoned.[28]
>
> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

> Princess Leia: But, why must you confront him?
> Luke: Because, there is good in him. I've felt it. He won't turn me over to the Emperor. I can save him. I can turn him back to the good side. I have to try.[29]
>
> George Lucas, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*

As *Return of the Jedi* opens, Luke has undergone quite a transformation from the innocent farm boy we were introduced to in *A New Hope*; garbed in all black, at one with the Force and confident in his new abilities he glides into Jabba's palace to rescue his companions. Although Luke has made a transition into a new maturity and understanding of his newfound powers, both friends and enemies alike are doubtful of his transformation, so the road to the return will be a bumpy one. Luke is not the only one who transforms literally and figuratively in the final stage of the saga; Leia's first appearance is as a shapeshifter in the guise of Boushh the bounty hunter, and it is Leia who boldly rescues Han from his carbonite tomb. Turning the tables on the Sleeping Beauty tale, Leia wakes Han from his enchanted slumber and seals her triumph with a kiss. Unfortunately for Leia, the odious gangster Jabba the Hutt has anticipated her rescue and is waiting to enslave her and imprison the newly resurrected Han. It is up to Luke to save the day.

Even with his newly acquired abilities, Luke has not completed his Jedi training and perhaps due to this fact, he ends up plummeting into the Rancor pit where he will meet and combat a monster. Once again Luke's wits and mastery of the Force allow him to vanquish the creature in hand-to-hand combat. His victory is short-lived as Jabba decrees that the heroes will be executed, forced into the gullet of the Sarlacc, where they will be "slowly digested over a thousand years."[30] The fear of consumption in the *Star Wars* saga is always prevalent and associated with characters or landscapes that threaten to destroy the heroes; "food itself takes on an element of the frighteningly demonic, the desire to eat or binge becomes synonymous with monstrosity"; Jabba the Hutt is a perfect example of this.[31] As a modern interpretation of the Dragon, Jabba hoards treasure and captures maidens but has no actual use for either, so instead he impotently munches on frogs, licks his lips as he watches his dancer consumed by the Rancor and hungrily eyes Princess Leia, who is forced to submit to his leering. The Sarlacc, with its roiling tentacles and gaping maw, resembles the abyss and certainly will mean horrific death for our heroes if they are eaten by it.

Luke has other plans and in keeping with his new Jedi image he has orchestrated an escape plan that utilizes all of the skills of his companions. Luke does not work alone but in tandem with his friends to spring from the plank, catch his lightsaber, and slash his way through their enemies. Leia even uses her instrument of bondage, the chain binding her to Jabba, in order to strangle her enslaver, and appropriately it is the Princess who now

saves herself from peril. Even Lando strives to redeem himself by helping Han escape from Jabba's clutches; ultimately it is a blinded Han Solo who ends up saving Lando from the Sarlacc pit. Lando has atoned for his betrayal on the Cloud City and returns with the rebels to lead an attack on the resurrected Death Star.

Luke is now free to return to Dagobah to keep his promise to Yoda and finish his Jedi training. Upon arriving, Luke faces yet another tragic death and the revelation of a secret that will help bring him closer to the conclusion of his journey. Yoda reveals on his deathbed that in order to complete his training, Luke must face his father and vanquish the Dark Side of the Force; before Yoda dies, he tells Luke there is "another Skywalker." Feeling despondent after Yoda's passing, Luke is consoled by Obi-Wan, who confirms the fact that Luke has a twin sister and this sister is Leia. This revelation revitalizes Luke's commitment to facing his father and bringing him back from the Dark Side, connecting with his twin sister, and bringing balance back to the Force.

Han's rebirth at Jabba's palace is evident as he takes on a difficult challenge and will lead a group of rebels to Endor and deactivate the deflector shield that is surrounding the new Death Star. Selfless and altruistic, Han has transformed from the narcissistic mercenary we met in *A New Hope* into a leader, a lover, and a hero. Han even offers the *Millennium Falcon* to Lando; the *Falcon* is no longer his most prized possession nor is it the object of his ultimate affection now that his love for Princess Leia has been professed and reciprocated.

Rebirth and life may be blossoming in the Rebellion but the Empire is rife with stagnation and death represented by the arrival of the Emperor on the Death Star. His appearance is repugnant, reminiscent of death itself, ancient, diseased, enshrouded in dark robes with vampiric pallor and raspy voice. The new Death Star is a hulking technological monstrosity, a mirror image of the original; the Galactic Empire cannot create new life; they can only imitate the past and proliferate tyranny. The leader of the Galactic Empire is a bitter old man who clings to life out of spite, manipulating the Dark Side of the Force to bring about Luke Skywalker's defeat. The Emperor is the serpent that poisoned the Galactic Empire from within and orchestrated Anakin's fall from grace into the twisted machine form of Darth Vader.

Upon landing on Endor the heroes are once again submerged into an enchanted forest and meet helpful animals in the form of the tribal Ewoks. Endor with its lush vegetation and natural symbiosis between animals and the environment is in stark contrast with the technological monster that is the invading Galactic Empire. The Ewoks mistake Luke, Han, and Chewbacca for food and intend to roast them at a feast in C-3PO's name, as they have confused him for a deity. Although it might seem that C-3PO

is caught up in the heroic stage of apotheosis, he does not actually achieve godlike mastery; in fact it is Luke who uses C-3PO as an instrument to gain their freedom from bondage. C-3PO does finally achieve his transformation into a hero of the Rebellion when he uses his storytelling talents to win the Ewoks over to the greater cause of expelling the Empire from their paradise. In *A New Hope*, C-3PO lamented "I'm not much more than an interpreter, and not very good at telling stories. Well, not at making them interesting, anyways," but now he's the reason the Ewoks make the rebels a part of their tribe.[32]

On Endor we have seen a softer, more feminine version of Leia, her hair not confined, no longer in military fatigues and openly expressing her love for Han. Luke must leave on his final journey to meet his destiny but before sacrificing himself he tells Leia of their connection and the sins of their father that both carry. Leia's strength, femininity, and power are cresting as she learns of her potential Jedi abilities and acknowledges that her greater destiny is something she has somehow always known was within her. Now that Luke and Leia have found out the truth about their lineage and bonded, they are free to blossom into ideal heroes, combining feminine/masculine and light/dark aspects of their psyche to find balance within and without.

Luke's journey to the new Death Star is another descent into the Underworld, with the Emperor as the monster in the middle of the labyrinth. Luke has accepted the potential for evil in him yet yearns to reconcile with his father and bring about Vader's redemption. According to Yoda and Obi-Wan there are only two choices Luke can make: join the Dark Side like his father before him or strike the Emperor and Vader down. Since Luke is a hero he comes up with an alternative resolution to the inner and outer conflict that has shaped his destiny. He chooses to deny the Dark Side and bring his father back into the light and salvation.

As Luke struggles with the Dark Side, the battle rages on Endor and outside the Death Star. New heroes are born as they realize their potential and accept their own role in the journey: Lando and Wedge work together to battle the seemingly insurmountable Imperial Squadron as well as the fully operational Death Star; Chewbacca teams up with the Ewoks to hijack a AT-ST walker and turn the tide of the battle; R2-D2 and C-3PO charge into certain danger; Han and Leia storm the bunker, deactivating the shield generator; and the Ewoks face considerable loss to help their new tribe members realize their goal. It's worth noting that the Ewoks use crude handmade instruments and guerilla fighting techniques to vanquish the hi-tech reliant Imperial forces. It is the humanity and ingenuity of the Ewoks that wins out over the technological might of the Empire.

The Emperor goads Luke incessantly, encouraging him to give in to fear, anger, and aggression so that he can join the Dark Side of the Force and meet his destiny. It is only when the Emperor hits on Luke's love for his

friends and their eminent doom at his own hand that Luke retrieves his lightsaber and begins to battle both his father and the darkness within himself. After trading blows Luke hides from Vader, proclaiming that he will not fight him. Vader has learned well from his evil mentor and searches Luke's conflicted feelings to find the emotional trigger for his rage: "Give yourself to the Dark Side. It is the only way you can save your friends. Yes, your thoughts betray you. Your feelings for them are strong. Especially for . . . a sister. So, you have a twin sister. Your feelings have now betrayed her, too. Obi-Wan was wise to hide her from me. Now his failure is complete. If you will not turn to the Dark Side . . . then perhaps she will."[33]

Out of fear, aggression, and hate, Luke launches himself at Vader and relentlessly battles him to the ground, severing his right hand and exposing the mechanical circuits that have replaced his flesh. This is Luke's moment of realization; he is no different from his father, they share the mark of Cain and the sins of the father have been visited upon him; he teeters on the precipice of the Dark Side and could easily become the next Vader. As the Emperor looks on, Luke tosses his lightsaber away proclaiming, "I'll never turn to the Dark Side. You've failed, your highness. I am a Jedi, like my father before me"; this is his moment of self-realization and triumph.[34] The Emperor, enraged by Luke's denial, begins sadistically attacking with Force lightning. As Luke is tortured, writhing on the floor calling to his father, Darth Vader looks on in evident turmoil; the hero's journey now becomes Anakin Skywalker's redemptive return from the fall as he lifts the Emperor over his head and hurtles him down a shaft to his stormy death.

As the Rebels penetrate the Death Star's defenses and begin their assault on the technological monster, Luke struggles to carry his father to safety. Vader insists that Luke remove his mask: "Just for once . . . let me . . . look on you with my *own* eyes"; he understands the importance of discarding the mask of technology so that the shadow of Darth Vader can die and be replaced by the frail *human* image of Anakin Skywalker.[35] According to Joseph Campbell, this moment is essential for the hero's journey to be complete: "The hero beholds the face of the father, understands and the two are atoned. . . . For the son who has grown really to know the father, the agonies of the ordeal are readily borne; the world is no longer a vale of tears but a bliss-yielding, perpetual manifestation of the Presence."[36]

After returning to Endor with Anakin's body, Luke gives his father a hero's burial complete with funeral pyre. The same fire of damnation that burned the humanity from Anakin's soul on Mustafar has now become a cleansing fire, purging the visage of Darth Vader from the galaxy. Anakin is

now allowed to ascend because he has fulfilled the prophecy and returned balance to the Force through the love of his son; Anakin is now a part of the Jedi trio at the celebration, smiling benevolently down on Luke, as he is finally free to join the celebration. Luke has completed his hero's journey; he has been the catalyst for the destruction of the Sith, restored peace, love, and a future without tyranny to the Universe.

CONCLUSION

Joseph Campbell, arguably the most influential force behind the original *Star Wars* trilogy, asserts that "Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes and the deeds of myth survive into modern times."[37] If this is true, cinema has surely taken the place of mythic cave paintings, temple carvings, and shaman storytellers in offering a contemporary visual metaphor for the experience of life. Myths at their core are cautionary tales, a way to make sense of the Universe and our place within it; in modern times the archaic values of mythology don't seem to have a place in society, at least until they are reinterpreted. The original *Star Wars* saga is modern mythology at its best, full of trials, adventure, love, danger, and at its center a story about the very nature of humanity. *Star Wars* has become a touchstone for countless fans and continues to reach across societal barriers of age, race, and sex.

Plenty of fan-generated vitriol has been leveled at George Lucas since the release of the three prequels; many fans feel that the prequels take the focus of the saga away from Luke (the hero we grew up idolizing) and instead make the overall story Anakin's. From a certain point of view this might be true, but if one understands that Luke's and Anakin's destinies have always been intertwined, and that it is because of Luke's journey that Anakin is able to find salvation, *Star Wars* becomes a cyclical monomyth. It is also important to note that Lucas believes in the importance of the individual but is not limited by it; although Luke is the main hero of the saga he is surrounded by exceptional characters who all undergo their own transformations and heroic journeys.

There are countless themes and subthemes within the Lucas narrative that both reinforce and illustrate lessons that have been handed down to us across the ages: humanity vs. machine, good vs. evil, light vs. dark, archetypes of the mentor, shapeshifter, earth mother, trickster, shadow, and hero. One person can make a difference even when opposed by the relentlessness of technology; in the Lucas universe, humanity will always triumph over the machine. *Star Wars* seamlessly fulfills the function of myth: opening our hearts and minds to the mystery in our lives.

NOTES

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5. Campbell, *Hero*, 30.
6. Campbell, *Hero*, 58.
7. Campbell, *Hero*, 49.
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35. Lucas and Kasdan, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*.
36. Campbell, *Hero*, 147–48.
37. Campbell, *Hero*, 4.

5

Not So Long Ago nor Far Away

New Variations on Old Themes and Questioning *Star Wars'* Revival of Heroic Archetypes

Dan Rubey

George Lucas's enormously popular *Star Wars* (1977) plugs into the central nervous system of its audience by mixing an American love of machinery with the heroic myths and dreams of western European civilization.[1] This technological fairy tale reflects in the symbolic language of its images the desires and ambiguities produced by living inside a machine-oriented technology, supported by anachronistic ideologies of individual heroism and metaphysical justification. *Star Wars* embraces technology in order to enjoy the sensations of power and exhilaration it offers. Then it falls back on heroic individual action and the metaphysical, nonrational Force to solve the problem of eroded values and depersonalized experiences created by that technology. The film's combination of traditional models of individual combat with the technology of electronic warfare reromanticizes war, creating a new set of heroic images appropriate to a technological age and the kind of electronic warfare the United States waged in Vietnam. The meaning of *Star Wars* and much of its appeal depend on the ways in which the striking special effects reinforce the fantasies and mythic echoes of the plot.

THE VISUAL IMAGES

The visual aesthetic of *Star Wars* is a machine aesthetic, one that invests machine surfaces with the life and interest denied human forms. The film uses images of size, speed, sharp contrasts, and violent action to create a

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The original essay has been edited to fit within this anthology.

visual counterpart to the plot structures, in which monstrous and powerful enemies menace the young rebels.

The visual and aural experience of *Star Wars* was intended to be as overwhelming as possible. The 70mm film and Dolby quadraphonic sound amplify the impact of the images and the volume of the sound, enclosing the viewer in the world of the film. The general visual pattern involves contrasts between overwhelmingly large images and vulnerably small ones. In the opening shot, for example, a tiny spaceship is pursued by another ship of enormous size that slowly enters the screen from the right top corner, moves into the center of the screen, and finally fills it entirely, engulfing the smaller ship. This visual dichotomy of small and large reinforces the dichotomy of good-young-less-powerful versus evil-older-more-powerful that organizes the plot, and it helps the audience participate emotionally in the vulnerability of Luke and the Princess.

Most of the special effects involve either explosions or simulations of dazzling speed and acceleration, usually involving bright light against a dark black background, as in the explosion of the Death Star or the jump into hyperspace. Stark contrasts of light and dark, black and white, are used to organize shots: the white ships against the black void of space, Darth Vader's black robes and Luke and the Princess's white ones. When the colors are not simply black and white, they are usually restricted to metallic gold and silver, the colors of the world of spaceships and robots. These patterns and the ear-shattering noises create a machine ambience for the film, a basically inhuman atmosphere—hard-edged, dry, and metallic. Initially, technology seems menacing in images such as the enormous battleship, or the Death Star, or Darth Vader's face-mask. But every frame of the film celebrates machines and the speed and power they seem to promise, and the special effects create a technological kick for the audience.

The special effects of *Star Wars* derive largely from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), but a second-generation computer technology makes them much more sophisticated.[2] Lucas's effects are classier and he can do more with them, particularly in simulating three-dimensional movement. But *2001* director Stanley Kubrick introduced new kinds of special effects to try to create visual images of a different order of reality and to force his audiences to participate in the disorientation of the characters in the film. Lucas simply uses special effects to heighten the intensity of his combat sequences, to make them super-real, while at the same time keeping us firmly grounded in the familiar world of World War II dogfights and police-movie car chases. The special effects in *2001* move us out of the technological world portrayed in the film and create feelings of otherness, other spaces, other kinds of experiences. In *Star Wars* the special effects involve us more deeply in the technological, machine-oriented ambience of the film, producing

visceral effects that heighten our involvement in the conventional patterns of the fantasy structure.

Compare, for example, the shot in *2001* where the space pod containing Bowman rushes between the converging horizontal and vertical planes of colored lights in deep space, and the parallel shot in *Star Wars* where Luke and the other pilots attack the Death Star by flying at great speed down a narrow trench in the surface of the space station. In both films the tremendous speed and acceleration produce excitement and a touch of fear in the audience. Kubrick's *2001* simply presents the visual effect, with only a vague context for it ("Beyond Infinity"). This lack of definition increases the audience's sense of disorientation. Bowman's helplessness inside the machine, his inability to control or even understand what is happening to him, gives the scene a powerful sense of ambiguity and anxiety. On the one hand, the pod is his only protection in this tremendously threatening environment, the only thing that is keeping him alive and connected to reality. But on the other hand, the pod itself seems like a trap, something encapsulating him, keeping him from the world outside. The very word "pod" suggests a seed pod, and the whole sequence becomes an experience of birth or rebirth.

In the comparable scene in *Star Wars*, the combat context creates a focus for the feelings of anxiety and excitement generated by the visual effects, and transforms the anxiety into feelings of aggression and violence. Since the feelings of unease have a specific focus on the plot level—the desire for the destruction of the space station—the explosion of the Death Star serves as catharsis. The sequence generates a desire to use the machine more skillfully, not to escape from it. For Kubrick, human dependence on technology is simply one stage in evolution, and the obelisks represent an extra-human reality. In *Star Wars*, the Force is a better bombsight.

In *Star Wars*, the special effects—the speed, lasers, explosions, the jump into hyperspace, the noise—excite and satisfy the audience in their own terms, almost apart from any connection to the narrative line. The constant contrasts of large and small call up feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, which in turn reflect the frustrations (general and specific) of the targeted youthful audience. These frustrations are then satisfied by the feelings of enormous power created by the film's machine aesthetic and the special effects of speed, power, and violence. The machine ambience of the film provides an illusion of power and control, the ability to escape the limitations of our bodies. It enables us to take on the nature of our machines and share in their power and relative invulnerability—the bionic fantasy of television shows and comic books. Machines move as fast as we can think, erasing the gap between thought and performance, desire and satisfaction, making us into comic book superheroes.

But this fusion with the machine and machine sensibility has some strongly dehumanizing side effects, partly as a result of placing the machine between ourselves and what it acts on, and in part because of the nature of the film medium itself. As sophisticated viewers of film, we have learned to pay attention solely to what we're seeing on the screen and not to speculate about what is not shown. (Less cinematically sophisticated audiences interrupt the film to ask questions about characters who have disappeared from the screen.)[3] So when ships or planets blow up, we do not think about the people who presumably die in those explosions. The special effects tend to exist for their own sake, regardless of their function in the plot, and we take them in without examining their implications.

As a visual image, the destruction of the planet Alderaan looks very much like the explosion of the Death Star, and Obi-Wan Kenobi's brief attack of heartburn does not convince us that something tragic has happened. We do not experience the deaths of the people on the planet, and thus those people do not exist in the film. Both explosions are visual experiences to be enjoyed in aesthetic terms. Everything is a visual trip, an aesthetic experience.

This act of turning war into aesthetic experience seems connected to the increased use of airplanes in World War II, and to the images of the air war created in both the news media and in films about the war. World War II films tend to move in one of two directions—toward infantry "war is hell" movies that record the blood-and-guts suffering of the war on the ground and occasionally its effect on the civilian population. Or the films move toward air-war, fighter-pilot ones that romanticize war and combat and take place in the more abstract and generalized realm of the sky. These differences reflect real dissimilarities in the two modes of warfare, that of the ground troops who have no escape from the war and its implications, and the pilots who live in protected rear areas and fly to the war as if going to work, experiencing combat as moments of great intensity and exhilaration spaced out by respites in comparatively comfortable surroundings.

The actual physical detachment from the realities of war on the ground lends itself to the aestheticization of war and to a psychic detachment from what is really going on, which is evident in the treatment of the war in the media. In a Movietone News film clip, reproduced in Marcel Ophüls's film on the Nuremberg trials, *Memory of Justice* (1976), the narrator describes footage of the night firebombing of Dresden, perhaps the greatest Allied atrocity of the war, as "magnificent bombing shots." And, in fact, aesthetically the footage is very beautiful. But such a judgment completely leaves out any translation of what those images actually mean—the burning and destruction of the city and the hideous deaths of 35,000 civilians.

These air-war films are the lineal ancestors of the combat sequences in *Star Wars*. Lucas used actual footage of dogfights in those films to construct his own sequences. Lucas explains:

"The dogfight sequence was extremely hard to cut and edit. We had storyboards that we had taken from old movies intercut with pilots talking and stuff, so you could edit the whole sequence in real time."[4]

But despite its roots in World War II films, the sophisticated level of technology in *Star Wars*—the use of computers, missiles, and lasers, the flashing space-age control panels, the beeping radar gunsights—actually reflects the air war in Vietnam, the technological warfare of what pilots called "the Blue Machine," the U.S. Air Force. *Star Wars* is the first war movie of a new age of electronic combat, a prediction of what war will feel like for combatants completely encapsulated in technology, like the soldiers in Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (written in 1959).

The dogfights and one-man fighters are a romantic attempt to recapture the glamour of WWII films and disassociate ourselves from the destructive role that our bombers and rockets actually played in Vietnam by projecting that aspect of the war onto the Death Star. By associating the bad guys with the heavily armored Death Star, which destroys a helpless planet, and the good guys with the small one-man fighters, *Star Wars* uses an image of ourselves from the past as a defense against our more recent history.

But this separation is not so simple. The technology of the air war in Vietnam was a natural outgrowth of the more primitive machines of World War II, and the attitudes of the pilots about what they were doing in Vietnam was fundamentally the same as the attitude expressed in the Movietone News film of the fire-bombing of Dresden. Totally cut off from the effects of what they were doing by the speed and accuracy of their machines, the pilots viewed their bombing runs as aesthetic experiences, as exciting and exhilarating moments in their lives—the experience that *Star Wars* re-creates through its use of special effects. In Peter Davis's 1974 film *Hearts and Minds*, one of the pilots says that the bombing runs were like "a singer singing an aria." The pilots took pride in their technical expertise; they found the excitement of seeing the bombs explode to be "incredible," "thrilling, deeply satisfying." But they never saw any people, or any blood. As one flyer says,

> You could never see the people. You never saw any blood. You could never hear any screams. It was very clean. I was a technician.

Robert Lifton argues in his study of Vietnam veterans that technological warfare like the U.S. air war in Vietnam has an avoidance of guilt built into it. Lifton says,

> Increasing technicizing of the war makes certain that the people we kill are outside of our immediate and imaginative vision.[5]

In this kind of war in which the killers and their victims are separated by such vast distances, the only awareness of the "enemy" comes as electronic

feedback in the form of blips on a screen. This technological detachment from the realities of war makes possible what Lifton calls "numbed warfare: killing with a near-total separation of act from idea."[6] The sensory equipment of the machines becomes an extension of the pilot's sensory equipment—a substitute for it—and along with it the pilots seem to take on the machine's lack of moral sensibility as well.

Fred Branfman records a statement by a flyer in a *Washington Monthly* article on the era of the Blue Machine in Laos:

> You become a part of the machine as you really do it. Guys who fly keep their professionality. . . . I haven't bombed now for three months and I really feel out of shape. The key is to be able to bomb without really thinking about it, automatically, to take evasive action . . . instinctively—to be able to do this you have to be flying every day.[7]

This statement is a good description of Luke's final attack on the Death Star, the scene in which he switches off his gunsight and releases the missile instinctively, in a fantasy of bionic fusion with his ship, a fusion made possible by the Force.

Star Wars reproduces the sensory experience and the excitement of technological warfare with its use of special effects. Then it uses the plot to provide a romance-fantasy structure that glamorizes and justifies this kind of experience. The film articulates and feeds on its audience's feelings of frustration and desires for escape, mobility, and power. It satisfies those frustrations and desires with conventional fantasies about good and evil, the family romance, vague mystical forces that guide and give meaning, and images of war and combat as metaphors for competition and individuality. In the process, the film endorses both the traditional structures of racism, sexism, and social hierarchy that have helped to create and maintain those frustrations, and the monocular attitudes toward technology that form an important part of the whole ideological package.

FANTASY SYSTEMS AND THE BIAS OF MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

Star Wars is not a science fiction film; it is a combination of what used to be called "sword and sorcery" and "space opera," and is now usually lumped together as "epic fantasy." Lucas says he wanted to make a space fantasy in the genre of Edgar Rice Burroughs rather than Stanley Kubrick's *2001*. He wanted to do a film for "kids" and "the kids in all of us" that would restore "the fairy tales and dragons and Tolkien and all the real heroes" left out of science fiction and films in general since the 1950s.

Lucas wants to turn "some ten-year-old kid" on to outer space and the possibilities of romance and adventure in space exploration: "What we really need to do is to colonize the next galaxy, get away from the hard facts of *2001* and get on the romantic side of it." When we colonize Mars, we will "go with Stanley's ships but hopefully we are going to be carrying my laser sword and have the Wookiee at our side." That is, the actual exploration and colonization of space Lucas hopes for in the future will be accomplished by the realistic technology of *2001*, but *Star Wars* will provide the fantasies and motives of the explorers. Lucas says,

> I would feel very good if someday they colonize Mars when I am 93 years old or whatever, and the leader of the first colony says: "I really did it because I was hoping there would be a Wookiee up there."[8]

These ingenuous statements about fantasy and kids and the irrational serve to disguise Lucas's conservative ideological bias, his assumption that humanity's greatest challenge still lies in expansion and the conquest of new territorial frontiers. Space is the new West, the new frontier to be opened and exploited. Instead of using our energies and resources to deal with problems we have created within the frontiers we already have, we can continue to direct them outward in fantasies of endless worlds and limitless expansion.

Lucas ignores the ideological character of these views by claiming he is working inside an eternal tradition of fairy tales and myths stretching from Homer's *Odyssey* to John Ford's Westerns. He says of the kind of adventure he is trying to re-create for kids today:

> I call it the fairy tale or the myth. It is a children's story in history and you go back to the Odyssey . . . the myths which existed in high adventure, and an exotic far-off land which was always that place over the hill, Camelot, Robin Hood, Treasure Island. That sort of stuff that is always big adventure out there somewhere. It came all the way down through the western.[9]

But Lucas's picture of an unbroken tradition of adventure mythology stretching from Homer to John Ford ignores both the specific meanings these stories had for the societies that created them and the important differences between them. Myths and fantasies are not eternal: they are historical.

To trace the background of its genre briefly, the plot of *Star Wars* is a chivalric romance plot. Chivalric romance as a specific form in Western Europe first developed in twelfth-century France by authors such as Chrétien de Troyes, and remained widely popular throughout the sixteenth century. The form was revived in the nineteenth century by poets such as Tennyson (whose *Idyls of the King* is a reworking of the fifteenth-century *Morte d'Arthur*

of Malory), and writers like the socialist William Morris (in his *Well at the World's End*). These works and others like them filtered medieval romances through a gauze of nineteenth-century concerns. In turn, they became the sources of the sword-and-sorcery fantasies of the twentieth century, among them Tolkien's *Ring* series, begun in the 1930s, and contemporary works like Michael Moorcock's *Sword Rulers* series. So, even leaving aside the relation between chivalric romance and romantic (as opposed to realistic) novels, romance has been one of the most successful and long-lived of the fictional structures of Western culture.

Romance developed originally in a period when the rigid class structure of the first stages of medieval feudalism began to relax enough for the formation of a commercial middle class and a lower order of nobility within the aristocracy itself. Primarily the gradual granting of aristocratic status to the military class, the knights, formed this lower order of nobility. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, this class came to share the legal status, but not the power and wealth, of the great lords, and it filled an increasingly bureaucratic and administrative role in the growing governmental apparatus dominated by the lords.

Within this social framework, Arthurian romances like those of Chrétien (stories about the British King Arthur and his knights) articulated the desires of these lesser nobles for upward social mobility within the rigidly hierarchical feudal system. The fantasy structure of romance in this period depends on a combination of Germanic feudal military codes and the newly rediscovered Roman idea of the state and the Roman conception of imperial power as based on "popular sovereignty." It modifies earlier forms of Christianity, in which God forbade the taking of Christian lives, into a newer style of imperial Christianity, in which the state became the supreme moral force on earth and could order men to kill soldiers from rival Christian states in its name. Within this fantasy structure, military action for God and country (increasingly symbolized by an aristocratic woman) provides the path to recognition, fame, and acceptance (that is, social mobility). Combat becomes a symbolic rite of passage that has social as well as individual implications.

Romance fantasy was potentially revolutionary in the sense that it expressed desires for the overthrow of existing social hierarchies (often expressed through the reversal of male/female roles inherent in courtly love). But it finally served to support the existing hierarchy because the lesser nobility wanted to rise within the system and enjoy the fruits of being at the top rather than overthrow the system entirely, as the social conservatism of romance indicates. So as a genre, romance recognizes and expresses revolutionary impulses, but finally it defuses them and renders them harmless to the social structure as it exists.

This fundamental orientation persists within the form. When medieval romance (and medievalism in general) was revived in the nineteenth century, it was often used to suggest an alternative to industrialism and capitalism and their tendencies toward the destruction of human values. But this alternative had implicit within it a number of conservative and even reactionary strains. As Raymond Williams argued, this particular kind of critique of capitalism, with its nostalgia for past golden ages, knights in armor, and flowing robes, carries within it a system of received social values that, if they become active,

> at once spring to the defense of certain kinds of order, certain social hierarchies and moral stabilities, which have a feudal ring but a more relevant and more dangerous contemporary application.[10]

This implicit conservative and reactionary strain is present in *Star Wars*, and undercuts its tone of youthful rebelliousness. The final scene of the film, in which Luke and Han Solo walk between rows of uniformed soldiers at rigid attention to receive their medals, clearly echoes the march of Hitler, Himmler, and Lutze to the Nuremberg memorial in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*.[11] The grins that the heroes exchange with Princess Leia are meant to assure us that these three at least aren't taking all this military pomp very seriously. But since the scene and its totalitarian, fascist overtones grow so naturally out of the rest of the fantasies and images in the film, it seems fair to ask whether the grins really undercut this image, or if they simply allow it to function for us in much the same way that Riefenstahl's original image functioned.

The scene confirms all the hierarchical and militaristic values that have characterized the bad guys up to this point, and applies them to the heroes. Martial tones dominate the scene and the accompanying music. The military position of "attention" and the practice of lining troops up in precisely even rows is an attempt to deny the weakness and vulnerability of the human body, to make human beings hard-edged and precise like their weapons. Up to this conclusion, the bad guys have been associated with their rigid body armor, impenetrable mask-like helmets, and heavily armored Death Star. When so drastic a reversal or transition takes place at the end, it becomes important to try to understand the nature of that transition.

In romance, the generation gap functions as a symbolic representation of the split between upper and lower social levels, or between those with more power and wealth and those with less. The desire to grow up and escape the frustrations and restrictions of childhood by becoming an adult is symbolically analogous to the desire for upward social mobility. This connection falsely attaches the sense of inevitability, which is a natural part of the process

of growing up, to the desire for social mobility. Assuming there is no accident, everyone grows up; not everyone rises within the social system.

Luke represents both the youth/age and the class splits: he is young, living with his aunt and uncle. As we see him initially (and as he sees himself), he is a farmer, an unsophisticated, rural hick living on an unimportant planet in a backwater of the universe. Luke feels oppressed on the farm. His uncle needs his labor and refuses to let him go to the academy and become a fighter pilot, thus refusing to let him both grow up and move up socially. The youth/age, peasant/aristocrat split takes on another dimension, that of labor/management. Thus Luke's sense of frustration can resonate for the audience on a number of levels, depending on the circumstances of their own lives. Any or all three of these levels can be present at the same time. Luke's experience in the film provides a generalized fantasy vehicle through which the real experiences of the audience can be organized, "understood," and solved.

In the course of the film, Luke grows up by taking part in military action, moving simultaneously into a more cosmopolitan, aristocratic, big-city world. Indicatively, the language of the rural culture differs from the aristocratic one. Luke and his uncle and aunt speak plainly. Aristocratic characters like Princess Leia and Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi speak in the high-flown, ornamental rhetoric of romance and epic fantasy. This language can seem corny and even campy, but Lucas means it to be taken straight.[12] Their dialogue gives the aristocratic, cosmopolitan world Luke is trying to enter a heightened reality above that of everyday life. Lucas's instincts are sound on the point.

But if Luke is to rise socially, his success must be explained. A fantasy system like that of romance, which wishes on the one hand to allow for social mobility but on the other to retain the hierarchical status quo, must contain within it some explanation for the fact that not everyone in society rises. If everyone rose to the top, those at the top could no longer feel superior to anyone. On the other hand, if eligible people do not rise, then the social system itself appears unjust and the hero's success arbitrary and meaningless. These two requirements generate an ideology of individualism. The romance hero can win fame, glory, and the boss's daughter and still not threaten the hierarchical status quo because he is a uniquely talented individual.

In medieval romance the problem is solved by disguise and mistaken identity. The hero is in a situation in which his aristocratic identity is not known. He wins his victory and social acceptance through his own strength and courage, and then he reveals his identity at the end. This solution serves the dual function of proving that merit alone is enough to succeed but at the same time vindicating the social system by equating rank and merit in the hero's own person.

TECHNOLOGY, POWER, AND THE FORCE

If *Star Wars* is "about" anything, it is about power—and the source of ultimate power in the film is the Force. Equally vulnerable and helpless at the beginning, Luke grows up into possession of power and the Force while Princess Leia retreats into the background. This happens because power in *Star Wars* is male power, the patriarchal power of fathers and sons. Ben Kenobi says the Force is "the energy field surrounding all living things . . . it binds the universe together." But as the images presented in the film show, the Force is synonymous with Kenobi himself, the archetypal father and grandfather figure, the rescuer, protector, magician, master warrior, and wise man.[13]

The process of Luke's education and initiation in battle is a rite of passage into a nostalgic world of patriarchal power that no longer reflects either our contemporary society or childhood experience. It is a world in which power (symbolized by the Force) passes from father to son. Ben Kenobi is the means for Luke's coming into his true patriarchal heritage. He tells Luke that his father was not just a middle-class "navigator on a space freighter," but an aristocratic Jedi Knight. Kenobi gives Luke his father's laser sword, the ultimate phallic weapon (you carry it in your pocket until you need it, then press a button and it's three feet long and glows in the dark). It is a technological version of the Sword in the Stone that makes Arthur king of the Britons. Old Ben functions as a surrogate father for Luke, instructing him in the ways of weapons and the secrets of the Force.

Supposedly the collective will of millions of people, the Force is actually a mystical substitute for the collective action, learning, and hard work needed to effect change. It enables Luke to shortcut the necessarily lengthy process of growing up and acting effectively in the world. Ben urges Luke to use the Force in his sword practice, a Zen-archery technique that lets him shortcut years of practice by using his "feelings." Essentially Luke inherits his newfound powers and skills rather than earning them through learning and practice; the only price he pays for them is obedience. Luke actually internalizes Kenobi after the old magician's death. When he attacks the space station it is Luke's obedience to Kenobi's voice inside his head, his willingness to give up the rational control that the radarscope represents. His trust in the irrational, mystical Force enables him to penetrate the space station's defenses and shoot his missile into the station's one vulnerable spot—a phallic sexual conquest culminating in the orgasmic fireworks of the exploding Death Star.

If Luke is Kenobi's "good son" in this oedipal structure, Darth Vader is the "bad son," the student who rejects the master's teachings, allows himself to be seduced by the "Dark Side of the Force," and finally fights against and kills Kenobi. Darth Vader is the Faustian man of nineteenth-century

literature, the man in black seduced by the pursuit of dark knowledge and experience, unable to deny the definitions of right and wrong by which his community lives, but nevertheless choosing to defy them and place himself outside the society.[14] But whereas in European romantic works like Goethe's *Faust* the Faustian man is the protagonist and represents all of us in his feelings of alienation and rebellion, the U.S. Faustian man, like Cooper's Magua, Hawthorne's Chillingworth, or Melville's Ahab, is put outside of us as a dangerous Other, leaving us with a sanitized Romanticism that denies self-awareness and an honest confrontation with the destructive forces within. All that's left for the hero is the embrace of the society and its conformist tendencies. While Luke theoretically joins the "rebels," really Darth Vader is the rebel against the orderly succession of patriarchal power that structures the film's psychological fantasies.

These elements of the fantasy structure make the actual political situation in the film, its power relationships, confusing and contradictory. However, these confusions reflect some of the fundamental contradictions in contemporary foreign policy. The U.S. theoretical fondness for underdogs and rebels, stemming from our own revolutionary history, dictates that the good guys be rebels.[15] However, the film's romance fantasy structure and its support of traditional ideas of hierarchy and obedience demand equally that the bad guys be the rebels. The same confusion is reflected in the contradiction between the theoretical support of freedom and independence in the world by the United States and its actual support of oppressive and dictatorial regimes.

In *Star Wars* this confusion shows up most clearly in the role of Princess Leia, who as a part of the fantasy must be a *princess*, the daughter of the king deposed by evil tyrants, but in terms of the plot can only be a *senator* from the planet Alderaan, her father a simple general of the former Republic. In fact, she functions as both. The rebels are actually the loyalists, trying to preserve the old Republic, which has been somehow turned into an Empire headed by a ruler who has dissolved the Senate and allows men like Tarkin and Darth Vader to do as they please. Thus the rebels are in fact the restorers of the old order and not creators of a new one. They want to return to the old Republican days of the aristocratic Jedi Knights (whatever sense that makes), and it is Tarkin and Darth Vader who are the rebels against the old order.

All these permutations make the political background of the plot almost incomprehensible. Yet they maintain one of the most fundamental traditions of romance—that the hero cannot rebel against duly constituted authority, only against tyrannical usurpers. Tarkin and Darth Vader are bad because they use force to seize power. Luke and his new comrades are good because they derive their power and position from the metaphysical sanction of the Force and the moral and legal authority of the Republic.

As one experiences the film, however, without stopping to figure all this out, it seems simply that Luke and his friends rescue the Princess from the bad guys and are rewarded by her father who functions structurally, if not literally, as the Emperor. So the good guys are supporters of a hierarchical, imperial system with kings and princesses on the level of patriarchal fantasy, but supporters of the Republic and democracy on the level of the literal plot, a way to have your authoritarian cake and eat it, too.

Because of this contradiction at the center of the film, the distinction between good and evil itself tends to break down. Luke's victory does not revitalize the society or change it fundamentally—it simply replaces one order with another. The old status quo replaces the new one; now Luke is the insider, Darth Vader the outsider. There is no revolutionary change, no reordering of priorities, no new knowledge that fundamentally transforms reality, no alternative vision. All we really have are two similar groups competing for power and dichotomized into "good" and "evil." There is no complex understanding of what either good or evil could really mean.

Since there are no real distinctions between groups of characters, the narrative structure derives from a series of parallel sequences in which the good characters do exactly the same thing as the bad ones have done, but are *justified* in what they do. Compare, for example,

- Darth Vader's use of the Force in the council meeting to control his opponent and Ben Kenobi's use of the Force to get by the stormtroopers;
- or the "bad" guys' destruction of Alderaan and the "good" guys' destruction of the Death Star;
- or the attack and penetration of Princess Leia's ship by Darth Vader's men firing laser guns, and Luke and Han breaking into the control room on the Death Star in the rescue of the Princess;
- or Darth Vader breaking the neck of the technician on Princess Leia's ship and Ben Kenobi dismembering the alien in the bar scene;
- or the pursuit of Princess Leia's ship by the enormous ship of Tarkin and the pursuit of the imperial fighter by the *Millennium Falcon*; and so on.

The common denominators of these scenes are power and violence, and war is an ideal plot vehicle because it sanctions this violence, either to protect the community (Luke must destroy the Death Star before it destroys the rebels' planet), to avenge fallen family and comrades (Luke's family, the planet Alderaan, the other pilots), or to rescue and protect women (Princess Leia). The film makes Darth Vader and Grand Moff Tarkin as evil as they are *in order to* justify the violent actions of Luke and his comrades. The film pretends to depict the struggle of good against evil, but in fact the evil exists in order to allow the good characters to act violently. In other words,

Lucas's desire to make a film about laser guns and abducted princesses and interstellar combat impels him to generate the bad guys. It is not simply that the behavior of the bad guys forces Luke to take up arms. The real relation between good and evil in *Star Wars* is a symbiotic one: Comic book heroes need villains to justify their actions, and in the end the villains are usually more interesting anyway. Darth Vader became the most popular character in the *Star Wars* fan mags almost immediately.

Given this symbiotic relationship, the two groups of characters are distinguished primarily by their attitudes toward technology, the kind of technology they seem to represent. Lucas himself sees the fundamental difference between *Star Wars* and Kubrick's *2001* as one of attitude toward technology. Lucas says Kubrick is interested in technology, the "hard facts," the "rational side of things," while he is interested in romance and adventure, the "irrational side of things."

What Lucas sees as this fundamental difference in approach is articulated in two basic ways in *Star Wars*. First, the two groups of characters are characterized by what seem to be different approaches to technology or different kinds of technology. Darth Vader and Tarkin represent the large and impersonal, authoritarian, coldly rational forces that threaten us. They are characterized by the gigantic, impersonal, menacing Death Star, a prison and instrument of destruction run by bloodless technocrats. Luke and his companions are characterized by their one-man fighters and personalized robots, by Han Solo's eccentric hot-rod spaceship, and by Ben Kenobi's preference for the more traditionally elegant laser sword over the newer, "clumsier" blaster. This opposition between an individual or a small, coherent group and a large, impersonal, authoritarian force is a common motif in Hollywood films. In *Star Wars* this preference for the individual and traditional reflects the nostalgic, individualistic romance ethos of the fantasy structure.

Second, the Force seems to represent a withdrawal from technology altogether in favor of the irrational and mystical. Luke's droid is out of commission in the final attack on the Death Star, and he switches off his radar-controlled bombsight in response to Obi-Wan Kenobi's disembodied voice urging him to "use the Force . . . let go . . . trust me." In the novel, Lucas makes Luke's firing of the missile an unconscious act, something he cannot remember doing. The individual and the irrational triumph over the impersonal and the rational.

But Luke's merger with the all-encompassing Force is simply another version of the big, impersonal, authoritarian forces that Tarkin and his henchmen on the Death Star represent. It prefigures the neofascist militarism of the final scene in which Luke and Han are absorbed into the rebel order. This mysticism and irrationality are simply mysterious smoke screens for the reactionary ideology at the center of the film. *Star Wars* rejects tech-

nology in favor of the Force in order to disassociate itself from the more menacing aspects of technology run amok that threaten us. But practically every frame is a hymn to the technology that made the film possible. Lucas's claim to be interested in "the irrational" is simply an excuse for not looking more closely at the issues he raises. We cannot possibly abandon technology; we need it to survive. Even when Luke turns off the bombsight, he still remains encased in his ship, dependent on Han Solo to get Darth Vader's ships off his tail. His giving in to the Force is more a bionic fusion with his ship than a rejection of technology. It is an image of the union of man and machine.

Finally, this union of man and machine represents a fantasy of immortality, an assumption by human beings of the hard-edged, replaceable-part nature of machines. The Death Star is a symbol of death. Luke's destruction of it is a victory over death itself, accomplished with the aid of the Force. The concern with death runs throughout the film, and the robots serve as comic vehicles for the safe exploration of anxieties about death. C-3PO whines continually about his fears of being disconnected or sold for scrap. But both he and R2-D2 articulate bionic resurrection fantasies—for example, the reconnection of C-3PO's severed arm in contrast to the bar scene in which Ben Kenobi kills a "live" by cutting off his arm, or the resurrection of R2-D2 after the final battle in contrast to the more permanent deaths of the human pilots. The return of Ben Kenobi (Alec Guinness) as the voice of the Force is a mythic resurrection that connects the Force and immortality fantasies.

Aside from these fantasies, the real question is not whether we should depend on technology but what *kind* of technology we should adopt to solve our problems. Despite the superficial differences between the "good" technology of Luke and his friends and the "bad" technology of Tarkin and Darth Vader, *Star Wars* offers no real alternatives. The differences are stylistic rather than real. Both groups are characterized by a high-energy technology of weapons, power, noise, speed, and violence. Obi-Wan Kenobi's laser sword is still a weapon. Han Solo's *Millennium Falcon* is the fastest ship around, "the ship that made the Kessel run in less than twelve parsecs." Luke's innate flying skill was used to kill "womp-rats in my T-16 back home" and then to destroy the Death Star in his final initiation. There is no difference in the special effects treatment of the destruction of both the planet Alderaan and the Death Star, or in our reaction to either event, because finally there *is* no difference. Both are explosions, and explosions are fun. As a returned POW in *Hearts and Minds* says in justification of his role as a bomber pilot, "Almost everyone has blown off firecrackers. The excitement of those explosives hitting their targets is thrilling, deeply satisfying."

There is no sense in any of this of a truly alternative technology like the "small is beautiful" philosophy of E. F. Schumacher, with its orientation

away from size, speed, and violence and toward "the organic, the gentle, the non-violent, the elegant and beautiful," or like the soft-energy path of Amory Lovins with its emphasis on a technology of energy efficiency and conservation, and dependence on soft-energy sources like decentralized solar power and wind.[16] The difference between these technologies and the hard-energy technology of *Star Wars* is the difference between organic farming, ten-speed bicycles, and decentralized solar energy on the one hand, and chemical agribusiness, high-powered gas guzzlers, and nuclear power on the other. The first approach accepts natural limits and works within them; the second recognizes no limits and depends on ever-increasing power and expansion.

The only real alternative approach toward technology present in *Star Wars* is the self-sufficient farming technology of Luke's home. The desert planet Tatooine gives Lucas an opportunity to develop the kind of ecologically sensitive approach to technology that Frank Herbert developed in *Dune*, and the reference to "spice mines" and the skeleton of the sand worm that R2-D2 passes are allusions to Herbert's novel. But this alternative is destroyed when the stormtroopers burn Luke's home, and its rejection is an important part of the family-romance fantasy structure. This alternative technology ties in with the cast-off bourgeois world of his foster parents, and Luke moves on to excitement, hard-energy technology, and the aristocracy. Thus the desire for social mobility and a technology of power, speed, and violence are linked together, a linkage that reflects the film's capitalist ideology.

As Schumacher puts it, the modern private-enterprise system employs greed and envy as its motivating forces, and greed and envy demand continuous and limitless material growth.[17] Unlimited expansion is important to capitalism because only by constantly increasing the size of the economic pie can we keep attention away from the disproportionate and unequal size of the pieces.[18] But the inevitable outcome of this union of capitalism and the hard-energy technology to which it remains committed in order to ensure growth is an increasing concentration of capital, increasing centralization, and an increasingly authoritarian power structure, a combination that Lovins calls "friendly fascism."[19]

In the end, *Star Wars* embraces by implication all the things it pretends to oppose. The Nuremberg rally scene is a fitting conclusion coherent with the film's fascination with speed, size, and violence, and with the mysticism that cloaks the film's patriarchal power structures. The romance plot incorporates sexism and racism and supports a hierarchical social system that glamorizes those at the top and literally turns those at the bottom into machines. The robots in *Star Wars* do not represent the technology with a human face that Schumacher calls for. They are human beings turned into machines, a metallic Laurel and Hardy, the ultimate workers in a capitalist technology.

The film's commitment to excitement and speed locks it into a hard-energy weapons technology that undercuts its attempts to disassociate itself from the harmful and threatening aspects of that technology. By having no thought-out, consistent position on any of the issues he touches on, Lucas dooms *Star Wars* to repeat all the dominant ideological clichés of our society. That distant galaxy turns out to be not so far away after all.

NOTES

1. On November 19, 1977, *Star Wars* became [for the moment] the "new all-time top grossing film" in history, nosing out *JAWS* to achieve a cumulative domestic rental tally of $120,286,000 and a domestic box-office rental of $186,924,664 (*Variety*, Nov. 23, 1977).

2. There is a detailed technical account of these special effects in the July 1977 issue of *American Cinematographer*.

3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: New American Library, 1973), 284 ff.

4. Paul Scanlon, "The Force behind George Lucas," *Rolling Stone*, August 25, 1977, 48.

5. Robert Jay Lifton, *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans, Neither Victims nor Executioners* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 26–67.

6. Lifton, *Home*, 347.

7. Fred Branfman, "The Wild Blue Yonder over Laos," *Washington Monthly* 3 (July 1971): 28–43; quoted in Lifton, *Home*, 349.

8. Scanlon, "The Force," 43, 51.

9. George Lucas, *Star Wars: From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), 101.

10. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 36.

11. Arthur Lubow, "The Space Iliad," *Film Comment* 13 (July–August 1977): 20–21; Vincent Canby, *New York Times* Arts and Leisure Section, June 5, 1977.

12. When Lucas was asked about the corniness of Mark Hamill's lines, he said (Scanlon, "The Force," 48): "There is some very strong stuff in there. In the end, when you know better, it sort of takes a lot of guts to do it because it's the same thing with the whole movie—doing a children's film. I didn't want to play it down and make a camp movie, I wanted to make it a very good movie. And it wasn't camp, it was not making fun of itself. I wanted it to be real."

13. Freud coined the term "family romance" in 1897 and included a note on it in Otto Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (published in German in 1909), a work that applies the concept to mythology. For a discussion of the family romance and the work done since Freud and Rank, see Linda Joan Kaplan's "The Concept of the Family Romance," *Psychoanalytic Review* 61 (Summer 1974): 169–202.

14. See Leslie Fiedler's discussion of the Faustian man in *American Literature in Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein & Day, 1966).

15. This image of ourselves, which we project to the outside world, helps to explain why Ho Chi Minh initially thought the Americans would be his natural allies in the struggle against French colonialism.

16. E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 31; Amory B. Lovins, "Energy Strategy: The Road Not Taken?" *Foreign Affairs* 55 (October 1976): 64–96, and *Soft Energy Paths: Toward a Durable Peace* (San Francisco: Friends of the Earth International, 1977).

17. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful*, 247.

18. See Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

19. Lovins, *Soft Energy Paths*, 91–92, 95.

6

From Sky-Walking to Dark Knight of the Soul

George Lucas's *Star Wars* Turns to Tragic Drama

John C. McDowell

Following the shimmering appearance of "Lucasfilm" in glorious green letters on the silver screen, the triumphantly full orchestral theme by John Williams resounds. The audience at that point is greeted by the Flash Gordonesque introductory text that begins its fading crawl into the background, with its reference to civil war, rebel spaceships, "the evil Galactic Empire" and its "ultimate weapon," a princess, and an imperial pursuit of stolen plans. It does not take long for the camera to descend and focus on the atmosphere above the desert planet of Tatooine, and a moment of silence and calm is shattered by the determined pursuit of the little Rebel blockade runner Tantive IV by the hulking Imperial Star Destroyer. Within a few moments of the curtain drawing back, audiences the world over have been directed to what is promising to be a thrilling ride in the form of an action-packed space fantasy adventure. The movie simply entitled *Star Wars* (until the special edition of 1997) has indeed since proven to have been a unique moment in popular culture that has not only delighted audiences worldwide on a whole new scale but that has equally emptied parents' purses with the accompanying mass merchandising.

As is generally the case with most movies, independent or not, absent is the kind of literary quality of William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) Lear raging on the heath against what has befallen him at the hands of his ungrateful and self-aggrandizing daughters. And there is little sense of the complexity of the causes of suffering and wickedness that are explored to

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Abbreviations used in chapter: *SW* = *Star Wars*; *ANH* = *A New Hope* (1977); *ESB* = *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980); *ROTJ* = *Return of the Jedi* (1983); *TPM* = *The Phantom Menace* (1999); *AOTC* = *Attack of the Clones* (2002); ROTS = *Revenge of the Sith* (2005).

such dramatic effect in Sophocles's (c. 496–406 BCE) protagonist Oedipus who inadvertently creates the tragic situation when attempting to flee them, or Euripides's (c. 480–406 BCE) character Pentheus who becomes the victim of the god whom he offends, Dionysus. To put it in colloquial terms, in 1977's *Star Wars* the "baddies" were bad and the "goodies" were good, and apart from the ever so slightly more complex roguishness of Han Solo the twain never meet. George Lucas, the writer and director of the "space opera" *Star Wars*, expressed on screen something of his own boyhood love of the "good old days" of child-friendly space adventure serials such as *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers*, as well as of Westerns, swashbucklers, and war movies. And as Gary Westfahl argues, "Space opera is the . . . least [intellectually] respected, form of science fiction . . . scorned by learned commentators."[1] Surely this cannot be discussed in the same breath as tragic drama!

ENDING WITH A NEW BEGINNING: GESTURES TOWARD TRAGEDY

There are at least three main difficulties with any attempt to read *Star Wars* as tragic drama. The first one has to do with this way of reading the saga as a whole, rather even than in part, as light entertainment. *Star Wars*, it would seem, is "low" culture, simple heady escapist fare.[2] Soon after the release of the movie, Martin Scorsese complained, "*Star Wars* was in. Spielberg was in. We [the makers of intelligent films] were finished."[3] It might appear that this only becomes something different when used for rhetorical gain by Ronald Reagan. The president found popular appeal with his references to the "evil empire" in 1983 (Reagan's reference to the Soviet Union) and to the "Star Wars" missile defense policy. Yet this perspective is remarkably naive since there is no moment of cultural production that is not, in some way or another, significant. "A society's mass fantasies," Rowan Williams insightfully warns, "are anything but trivial."[4] Movies not only can tell us something of how the cultures from which they arise understand themselves, but they can equally creatively engage with the way their audiences come to understand themselves and thus shape what and how they see.[5] Intriguingly, Lucas claims to have specifically designed *Star Wars* to be broadly educational and remind a morally cynical generation in the mid-1970s of the importance of being morally responsible.[6] Moreover, the month before *Star Wars*' theatrical release Lucas declared, "I wanted to do a modern fairy tale, a myth."[7] For good or ill, the plot form of the first *Star Wars* movie demonstrably follows elements of the popular myth-scholar Joseph Campbell's "monomyth" of the hero's journey.[8]

A further difficulty involves the commonly heard idea that Anakin's fall comes out of nowhere.[9] This would entail that Lucas has been unable to

overturn the Manichaeism numerous commentators detect explicitly shaping *Star Wars* Episode IV, with just such an us-versus-them sensibility.[10] David Brin, however, recognizes that Lucas upholds "his saga as an agonized Greek tragedy worthy of *Oedipus*—an epic tale of a fallen hero, trapped by hubris and fate."[11] Brin's claim appears to suggest the problem to be largely one of style—that Lucas does indeed attempt to portray Anakin as a tragic hero, but does so badly. This claim needs to be critically tested.

In anticipation of the release of *Star Wars* in the cinemas, Lucas issued the novel in order to whet the public appetite. The prologue to that text relates part of the determinative backstory from *The Journal of the Whills*, and reads as a gesture toward a story of political intrigue and democratic decline potentially developable as a tragedy.[12] The Old Republic thrived and grew "under the wise rule of the Senate and the protection of the Jedi Knights," but rotted from within in a fashion that enabled the rise to power of "the ambitious Senator Palpatine," and under his self-declared *imperium* was instituted "a reign of terror."[13] Later in the story, some further suggestive details from the backstory are offered to Luke Skywalker by the old Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi, when he reveals that one of his very own young Jedi pupils (known in the prequels as Padawans) had "turned to evil," and this "Darth Vader" had "betrayed and murdered" Luke's father Anakin, and "helped the Empire hunt down and destroy the Jedi Knights. . . . Vader was seduced by the dark side of the Force." This was a significant theme that had been missed by Lucas's early biographer Dale Pollock, however, when asserting that "Lucas displayed in *Star Wars* a wholesome, naïve faith in the essential goodness of people."[14]

The tragic perspective of the prequels should, of course, hardly surprise viewers of episodes V and VI either, given the shocking revelation of Vader's having once been Anakin. The stage had been firmly set in the "classic trilogy" for revealing *Star Wars* as a kind of tragic drama.

"I WANT MORE" (ANAKIN, *AOTC*): THE TRAGIC PROTAGONIST FROM FLAWED HERO TO FACELESS ZERO

Where the mood and narrative form of the "classic trilogy" is presented as *The Adventures of Luke Skywalker*, those of the prequels appear quite different. As the credits opening *TPM* ominously announces, "Turmoil has engulfed the Republic," and that darkness now comes to cast its sinister shadow back over episodes IV–VI. This new emphasis transforms *Star Wars* from the celebratory mood that depicts the heroic adventures of Luke Skywalker into a mood of catastrophism that portrays the *tragedy of Anakin Skywalker*, which is probably why Lucas was reluctant to develop further his originally very broad plans for episodes VII–IX.

Tragic dramas come in many shapes and forms, and it can even be misleading to speak of them under a single categorizable heading such as "tragedy" without qualification.[15] In fact, the term "tragedy" itself is such an overburdened word in popular parlance, used in a range of contexts from the horrors of genocide all the way down to a bad essay grade, or the poorly judged purchase of an underperforming football player, or an eccentric fashion sense. Recalling the preeminent context of "tragedy" in "tragic dramas," Donald MacKinnon remarks that the latter "are inherently complex, and various in emphasis; at best we can discern a family resemblance between them."[16] Even though there is always the danger of "imposing an appearance of similarity of conception where it is at least equally important to stress differences," one account of tragedy has proven to be particularly well known and enduringly influential, so much so that it often serves as something of a touchstone for textbook depictions of tragedy. This is the portrayal offered by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) in his *Poetics*. Crucial for him is the identification of tragedy as a serious play that evokes fear (*phobos*) and pity (*eleos*), effecting through them "the *catharsis* of such emotions."[17] While scholars have much debated the meaning of this and disputed the interpretation, Lucas's use of it to determine the broad shape of the prequels is important. The fleshing out of the Vader character consequently makes him less a figure of audience loathing than one, at least potentially, who is able to provoke fear and pity, and this transformation can suitably challenge and purify our need for vengeance against one who had been characterized too simply as "evil" or "wicked." With the designing of the prequels, Lucas frequently admits that this "rehabilitation" of Darth Vader is "really what the story was all about," and in the early 1980s he had already worked out in quite detailed ways the direction his later movies would eventually take:

> Darth Vader became such an icon in the first film, *Episode IV*, that that icon of evil sort of took over everything, more than I intended. If it had been one movie that wouldn't have happened. . . . But now by adding *Episodes I, II* and *III* people begin to see the tragedy of Darth Vader as what it was originally intended to be.[18]

Evil does not come from nowhere but is "made," and in this way the tragically plotted prequels offer a considerably more complex response to the nature of moral development and misdevelopment than the depiction of *Star Wars* as evidently constrained by simplistic moral binaries would suggest.

> [*The*] *Phantom Menace* was done really to determine that Anakin was a good person, good heart, nice kid. We're not talking here about an evil little monster child—we're talking about this great kid just like we all start out as, or [we] think we start out as. . . . The whole reason for going back and doing the back

> story on *Star Wars* is that there is an evolution from this very good person, very kind person, very loving person into something that one would describe as evil.[19]

Evil is not something that just *happens to* us, or worse to *evil people*, but instead has considerably to do with the nature of our relations and complex choices, and the pressures that "conspire" to make people into something other than they can be morally.[20]

IGNORANCE OF THE FLAW OF FEAR IS THE PATH TO THE DARK SIDE

According to Aristotle, largely following the increasingly paradigmatic pattern of *Oedipus the King* rather than other quite different tragedies, the tragic protagonist is to be no ordinary personage but rather someone of significant social or political standing. This classical pattern was largely the norm until the thought of Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) and the more recent "domestic tragedies."[21] The protagonist is to be some eminent person, and frequently this has taken the form of a royal or some other high noble figuration. The "fall" is therefore more significant than the disruption of the protagonist and/or her closest relations alone. In fact, unlike *Oedipus*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, for whom this macrocosmic importance is implied, Lucas draws the personal fate of Anakin more directly into the tragic political story of the fall of the Republic.[22]

Unmistakably, Anakin is no ordinary character, and film critic Peter T. Chattaway entirely misses the point of the connection with classical tragic drama when he complains that "For all the talk of 'democracy,' . . . [*ROTS*] is actually less interested than any of the others in the lives of ordinary people."[23] Not merely is Anakin one of the Force-conscious minority from the ranks of which the revered icons of peace and justice are selected and trained, but the very nature of his *conception* and birth play a vital symbolic function in the narrative. An earlier conversation between Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn and Anakin's mother Shmi Skywalker suggests a "virgin conception," and the Jedi Master later makes the connection with the boy's identifiably high concentration of midi-chlorians.[24] The hero, in Carl Jung's terms, is a "greater man . . . semi-divine by nature,"[25] and it is highly likely that Lucas contrived his story here under Campbell's claim that the story of a virgin birth is a key part of the heroic monomyth. Nevertheless, the echoes of the messianic materials in the New Testament are also striking—so Qui-Gon believes that Anakin is "the Chosen One" whose coming to bring balance to "the Force" was prophesied long before [*TPM*]. The nobility required for the fall of the tragic hero type is secured here in the grandest

of terms. Given the immense power at his disposal, his fall cannot but have the most catastrophic consequences for even the galaxy itself.

Aristotle unpacks the character of the tragic protagonist by refusing two options, which would fail to provoke fear and pity in the audience.[26] Firstly, he claims, justifiably or not, that a wicked person's fall would not evoke the responses characteristic of a tragedy, presumably since the audience would consider this just recompense for the wicked acts. Secondly, the fall of a good person would simply shock the audience since an "innocent's" fall is merely traumatic and not tragic. Tragedy, instead, involves someone good who suffers a calamitous reversal of fortune by a *hamartia* (Greek, "error"), and falls into catastrophe (*nemesis*—Greek, "retribution").[27] One of the difficulties caused for someone like Brin, however, is that *hamartia* is often considered by commentators on Aristotle to involve a flaw that expresses a certain lack of virtue—Lear's *hubris* or pride, for instance, that demands the flattery of his daughters before he hands over the rule of his kingdom. In contrast, the nine-year-old slave boy of *TPM* is, critics argue, presented in unambiguously good terms to be a believable Vader-in-the-making. Anakin's fall seems to come out of nowhere.[28]

However, something vital to the meaning of *hamartia* is important to Aristotle's account of tragic dramas. It specifically bears the sense of ignorance and unwitting fall, in other words of tragic irony. As Baldick argues, "Aristotle's emphasis was . . . upon the protagonist's *action*, which could be brought about by misjudgement, ignorance or some other cause" rather than deliberately wicked willfulness as such.[29] After all, although Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* comes to recognize and admit his "pollution" in the murder of his father and marriage to his mother, he denies that he had erred since he had done both deeds inadvertently.[30] He caused the tragic situation in *Oedipus the King* by attempting to flee the oracle's prophecy that he would accomplish just such heinous deeds.

Illuminating in this regard is the scene in *ROTS* in which Anakin, now a young Jedi Knight and poster-boy hero of the Republic's war effort, rushes into the Galaxies Opera House on the planet Coruscant after Chancellor Palpatine summons him. While it would be too speculative to attempt to connect the setting of the Mon Calamari balletic performance and the commentary on the drama provided by the chorus in Attic tragedies, it is nonetheless interesting to note the importance of this scene to the tragic performance—it offers (commentary-like) insight into the unfolding tragedy and contributes to its development. Here Anakin displays something of his moral intentionality, reflecting the *good* but flawed character depicted by Aristotle. For instance, on the one hand he defends against Palpatine's criticism of the Jedi Order by appealing to the latter as good and selfless, and on the other hand, directed both by loyalty to a mentor and intense personal moral integrity, he refuses to fullfil the Council's order to spy on

the Chancellor. Nonetheless, Anakin can be seen here to suffer from at least three types of tragic "flaw."

Firstly, with his flattery of the young Jedi the wily politician is able to appeal to Anakin's pride. Pride, Chaucer's nun's priest famously summarizes in his tragic cautionary tale, comes before a fall. Despite the Jedi code, Yoda admits arrogance is "a flaw more and more common among Jedi. Too sure of themselves they are, even the older more experienced ones." Over the past decade Anakin has grown up with the memory of Qui-Gon's belief that he is "the one who will bring balance to the Force," whose coming an ancient prophecy had foretold [Mace Windu, *TPM*]. He has been led to believe that he "*is* the Chosen One" [Qui-Gon], the key to life, the universe, and all things, and this weighs heavily on his young and emotionally developing shoulders. However, his self-assurance makes him reckless, as his disastrous lightsaber challenge with Count Dooku demonstrates [*AOTC*]. Hayden Christensen, the actor portraying Anakin, comments, "He has . . . this unhealthy sense of grandeur."[31] In his unleashed torrent of uncontrollable and spiteful abuse of his mentor's name, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin alleges that his Master "is jealous," and this is why he is holding the Padawan back from realizing his full potential [*AOTC*]. "I'm not the Jedi I should be. I want more." This sounds like the stereotypically ill-tempered and whiny reaction of a sullen, headstrong adolescent to authority, particularly parental authority, as Henry Sheehan recognizes.[32]

> This is simple adolescent moral narcissism, an obnoxious period we all pass through. . . . Emotionally, this narcissism looms as Anakin's primary resentment. . . . Once you become alert to this side of *Revenge of the Sith*, then the whole *Star Wars* project begins to seem like a study of adolescent narcissism.[33]

Yet one cannot bypass the unhealthy exploitation of Anakin's ambitions by Palpatine. In a gentle moment reminiscent of a father-like conversation with a respectful son, the elder statesman instructs, "You don't need guidance, Anakin. In time you will learn to trust your feelings. Then you will be invincible. I have said it many times, you are the most gifted Jedi I have ever met. . . . I see you are becoming the greatest of all the Jedi, Anakin, even more powerful than Master Yoda" [*AOTC*]. Of course, all this is true—Anakin, has indeed a midi-chlorian concentration far surpassing even that of the great Yoda. Moreover, it is significant that the next scene contains a compliment by the highly renowned Jedi Master Mace Windu to the effect that "the boy has exceptional skill." The problem is what such feeding of compliments does to Anakin's ego; this fuels his resentment of Obi-Wan's guidance.

Secondly, Palpatine even more insidiously appeals to Anakin's fears—his paranoia over how the Jedi Council regards him, his concerns that

the virtues of the Jedi Council had been compromised by self-regard and misdirection, and his anxiety over the future of Padmé. Importantly, with regard to the second of these fears, by the time of *ROTS* the Jedi Order itself has become generally feared and distrusted, suspected in many circles of themselves plotting to seize political power, manipulating the military hostilities for their own ends. An expression of this mistrust appears in a deleted scene from *ROTS* in which Senator Mon Mothma worries about Padmé's desire to tell a Jedi of the Loyalist's "plot" and of the Petition of the Two Thousand—"We don't know where the Jedi fit into all this." Palpatine successfully intensifies Anakin's own worries about the Jedi by interfering inappropriately in internal Jedi matters when appointing Anakin to the Jedi Council. This deed is calculated to accentuate the Council's suspicions of Anakin and that, in turn, has a spiraling effect on the youth's already burgeoning paranoia and feeling of personal insult (there are suggestions that Anakin is already deeply wary of Mace).[34] His feeling of insult explodes in a rash outburst against Mace when the latter announces, "we do not grant you the rank of Master" [*ROTS*]. The camera greets Anakin's eruption with the faces of several embarrassed Jedi, and Obi-Wan shakes his head disappointedly at the evident lack of maturity displayed by his former Padawan. Anakin's complaint that "It's unfair" echoes his earlier adolescent bemoaning of Obi-Wan's restrictive tutelage, and the latter is a scene in which the seeds of darkness appear to be firmly flourishing in the young man's soul [*AOTC*].[35]

In the opera house box, Palpatine, after providing some attention-grabbing flattering of the young Jedi, speaks of a treasonable Jedi "plot." To an incredulous Anakin the Chancellor responds with a clever tapping into the youth's conscience: "They asked you to do something that made you feel dishonest, didn't they? They asked you to spy on me, didn't they?" Espionage directed against the Chancellor, Anakin had earlier complained to Obi-Wan, is itself treasonous, and the acutely honest younger man senses that the Council's request of him to engage in such a treacherous act conveys serious moral duplicity on the Jedi leadership's part. Anakin admits his unqualified loyalty to Palpatine: "The Chancellor is not a bad man, Obi-Wan. He befriended me, he's watched over me ever since I arrived here. . . . You're asking me to do something against the Jedi code, against the Republic, against a mentor and a friend, that's what's out of place here."[36] Of course, events would soon conspire to look as if a coup d'état is exactly what is occurring, and Mace's refusing that Anakin be present at Palpatine/Sidious's arrest only waters the seed of his suspicions. For now the politician has to turn his persuasive rhetoric in a more general direction, and the seed of mistrust is well and truly sown: "Remember back to your early teachings, all who gain power are afraid to lose it—even the Jedi." It is significant that Anakin does not turn this principle back on Palpatine and

on his achievement of power. Yet Obi-Wan had already suggested this man was clinging deliberatively and manipulatively to power after his term in office had expired. Instead, Anakin responds with an appeal to Jedi altruism: "The Jedi use their power for good."

Palpatine's approach now takes a slightly different tack, confusing Anakin about the very nature of moral reasoning itself: "Good is a point of view, Anakin." This might sound like moral relativism, but Palpatine is instead trying to encourage his immature conversant to appreciate that everyone associates their values with "the Good," and he then attempts to persuade that the Jedi's definition of good and evil may not be the best (dare I say it, the "true") one. He does this, of course, not in order to provoke Anakin into imagining there to be some *equally valid* moral consciousness in *both* Sith and Jedi, but rather to take him further toward believing in the ultimate rightness of the Sith *against* the Jedi. That is why he is ultimately attempting to instill Sith values in Anakin, and also why he moves on to announce the similarity of the Jedi and Sith in "their quest for greater power." Anakin's response is that the Sith "think inwards only about themselves." Palpatine's challenge "and the Jedi don't?" is a chilling deconstruction of moral endeavor, reducing it to power (that which the Sith appreciate and celebrate, while the Jedi openly deny but secretly practice). Stover's novelization makes this clear: the Sith are only evil "From a Jedi's point of view. . . . *Evil* is a label we put on those who threaten us, isn't it? Yet the Sith and the Jedi are similar in almost every way."[37] Later, of course, Anakin (now known as Darth Vader) announces this newly learned perspective when dreadfully dueling with Obi-Wan: "From my point of view the Jedi are evil." That certainly does not suggest that he has become a moral relativist—on the contrary, he could not have a more pronounced sense of absolute right. At this point it is Obi-Wan who casts suspicion on anyone's ability to make such absolutist claims for their own perspective: "Only a Sith deals in absolutes." This, too, is not moral relativism, but is rather a recognition of the fragility of goodness and of anyone's knowledge of it.

These observations on power and the exclusion of threatening others by associating them with "evil," and so on, are ethically astute, but nonetheless function as little more than a cover for Palpatine's method of persuasion, which is at heart that of accusation and suggestion. He does not allow Anakin to entertain the possibility that the Sith's way may truly be evil. Instead, he reduces the difference between Sith and Jedi down to a soundbite (against the "narrow dogmatic view of the Jedi"), and to a difference in degree (they differ only in method) rather than admit a qualitative difference (the very ends that determine their different methods radically differ).

Likewise, the statesman is even able to encourage Anakin to become suspicious of his own wife. In one deleted scene from *ROTS* the young Jedi significantly refuses to meet his wife's look with his own during Padmé's

confrontation of Palpatine on behalf of the Delegation of Two Thousand. Despite Anakin on this occasion concluding his conversation with the manipulative Palpatine with a note of faithfulness to his beloved, again the Chancellor has sown a seed of suspicion about her loyalty. An Anakin overwhelmed by emotional and ideological turmoil later has cause to doubt the integrity of Padmé further. In the privacy of their home his wife reveals her concern that the very "democracy we thought we were serving no longer exists, and the Republic has become the very evil we've been fighting to destroy." Anakin's political faith is, however, considerably more simplistic and unintuitive precisely because he associates the Republic with the Chancellor, and in Palpatine he has enormous faith (later he proclaims, "I will not betray the Republic. My loyalties lie with the Chancellor, and with the Senate, and with you."). Anakin turns on Padmé, spitting, "You're sounding like a Separatist." He is unwilling to hear criticism of his beliefs but instead deflects critical attention with an assertion of patriotic responsibility. The Loyalist attempt to *purify what is beloved*, as Bail Organa depicts his untreasonous loyalist work with Mon Mothma (in a deleted scene), is no more patriotic to Anakin's mind than Dooku's Separatist rebellion. The Jedi's tumultuous anxieties fix on Padmé being in the process of betraying him in league with Obi-Wan, a paranoia that comes to its uxoricidal breaking point on Mustafar.[38]

For now, however, at the opera house Palpatine simply but effectively exploits Anakin's fears for Padmé with his telling of the Sith legend of "the tragedy of Darth Plagueis the Wise," and tempts him with the vague and distant possibility of learning how to prevent his loved one from dying through the Dark Side of the Force. To understand this particular fear requires an appreciation of the appearance of a particular identifiable anxiety in *TPM* and its amplification in *AOTC*—the separation-from-mother complex.[39] When Anakin is first presented to the Council the Jedi are particularly concerned about this anxiety, and it initially costs him a position as a Jedi Padawan. "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering," the astute Master Yoda admonishes. Attachments to people and things induce fear over their loss, and this in turn moves us to attempt to secure their possession—this is what Jedi training constantly teaches is the path to "the dark side." "The fear of loss is a path to the dark side. . . . Attachment leads to jealousy. The shadow of greed that is. . . . Train to let go of everything you fear to lose" [Yoda, *ROTS*]. It is for that reason that Yoda's concluding declaration in the Jedi Council Chambers in *TPM*—"I sense much fear in you"—is another portentous warning that reverberates like a death knell through the succeeding two Episodes. Brin's claim about Anakin's untragic characterization is, therefore, exaggerated and inattentive to an evident emotional difficulty.[40] Anakin's fall has been a long time in the making.

By the time of *AOTC* Anakin has become a more complex figure than the boy of ten years earlier, although he is now crucially the neurotically intensified product of the loves, desires, and neuroses of that child. Significantly, he is now even rather ominously wearing darker colored robes than his Jedi kin. Speaking of the nineteen-year-old Anakin, Lucas claims,

> In this film, you begin to see that he has a fear of losing things, a fear of losing his mother, and as a result, he wants to begin to control things, he wants to become powerful, and these are not Jedi traits. And part of these are because he was starting to be trained so late in life, that he'd already formed these attachments. And for a Jedi, attachment is forbidden.[41]

Understandably, the young man bears deeply the wounds of leaving the mother to whom he was profoundly attached, and he is now visibly tortured by nightmares of her suffering severe pain. On initially leaving her a decade earlier, he had promised, "I will come back and free you, Mom" [*TPM*]. However, he had been unable to keep this pledge, and the resultant feeling of culpability weighs heavily on him. Rightly or wrongly, he blames and gradually resents the Jedi Order itself for this preventing him from rescuing her.

What we are entreated to in the grief scene on Tatooine in *AOTC* is the way Anakin's anger, guilt, resentment, and sorrow, all growing out of his attachment to his mother, take on a new form. The themes of a vicious rage fuelled by guilt and grief, and an arrogant adolescent resentment of his mentor literally combine melodiously as John Williams's musical leitmotifs associated with Darth Sidious and Vader play. In his anguish he claims to desire the power over life and death, the power to be able to "fix" life in the same way that he can exercise technical expertise over machinery. Here is an early indication of Anakin mechanistically reducing others' lives to the status of *things*, notably echoing the Siths' instrumentalizing disregard for the independent lives of others. Anakin's pain verbalizes that he "should be" all-powerful, and threateningly expresses a newfound determination "that someday I will be. I will be the most powerful Jedi ever. I promise you. I will even learn to stop people from dying." This is not merely his "grief talking" since a little later, when in a calmer frame of mind, he promises at his mother's graveside: "I wasn't strong enough to save you, Mom. . . . But I promise I won't fail again." He imagines that the solution is one of sheer power and brute force. The spirit of the Sith-way is already determinative, and is dramatically fulfilled later when—after dreaming of Padmé dying in childbirth—without any sense of "cost" he moves to secure the *power* he thinks is necessary for her safety from the scheming Palpatine/Sidious [*ROTS*].

Thirdly, the conversation between Palpatine and Anakin at the opera house is significant for another reason—it reveals and deepens Anakin's

trust of Palpatine, even at the expense of his trust of the Jedi Council. Palpatine exerts all his political charm to fuel Anakin's worries about the Jedi Order, and by this stage, the Chancellor has found a hearer—Anakin's love of the Council and its methods has been ebbing away and his trust of Palpatine has been growing ever stronger. Obi-Wan, it seems, has been unable to properly direct Anakin's emotional maturation and has become a figure that Anakin, in many ways, deeply resents. Later, of course, he would acknowledge to a seemingly dying young Vader in the hell of Mustafar, "I have failed you Anakin, I have failed you" [*ROTS*]. Put starkly, Obi-Wan is not the best person to guide someone like Anakin, and this gives both potency and poignancy to Qui-Gon's instruction to the nine-year-old Anakin: "Stay close to me and you'll be safe" [*TPM*]. And, as mentioned earlier, into that messy and emotionally charged relationship insidiously slithers Palpatine. Ian McDiarmid, who portrays Palpatine, interestingly comments, "If you wanted a subtitle for these movies it could be '"Fathers and Sons."' . . . Palpatine . . . is certainly a father-figure for him."[42] He comes to act where he can as a surrogate father figure, watching, guiding, advising, and supporting this young Jedi, and it is to him rather than Obi-Wan that Anakin wholeheartedly devotes his obedient trust. The statesman is integral to "feeding" or guiding Anakin's unhealthy self-consciousness, both feeding the rising Jedi star's ultimately detrimental feelings of ego-filled self-importance, and glorying in the flattery of Anakin's Force and military prowess. Moreover, he accentuates the mutual suspicions between Anakin and the Jedi Council, illegitimately interfering in Jedi business by appointing the young man to the Council [*ROTS*]. Finally, the Chancellor subtly undermines at every point the Jedi philosophy of the virtuous life, for instance in commanding Anakin to execute his defeated foe Count Dooku aboard Grievous's CIS flagship *The Invisible Hand* [*ROTS*]. The visibly troubled Jedi hesitates but then obeys Palpatine's overwhelming command, subsequently bitterly lamenting, "I shouldn't have done that. It's not the Jedi way" [*ROTS*]. The blood of Dooku now weighs as heavily on his mind as does that of the nomadic Tusken Raiders on Tatooine. Ironically, in fact, his fateful intervention against Mace's apparent attempt to execute justice on Palpatine, now revealed as the Sith Lord Darth Sidious, is motivated in part by his sense that the execution of Dooku was a moral mistake.

But perhaps there is even more to the Anakin-Palpatine relationship than this, something still more deeply sinister. There is some ambiguity, quite deliberate Lucas claims, in the relation of Anakin's forthcoming tragedy and his "virginal conception." The point at issue arises with Palpatine's recounting to Anakin of the Sith legend of "the Tragedy of Darth Plagueis" [*ROTS*]. Plagueis became so powerful that he could even manipulate the midi-chlorians in order to create life. This, of course, is a reference to the God-like desires of the Sith, but the audience's mind is cast back to Ana-

kin's apparent birth in "the Force." Is this a coincidental overlap of stories? The Chancellor reveals that Plagueis's pupil learned all that his Sith Master knew and then betrayed and murdered the teacher. In other words, another possessed the knowledge of how to manipulate the midi-chlorians to create life. The climax to this revelation comes in the Chancellor's chambers a few scenes later when he reveals his true *Sith* self—Darth Sidious—and tempts Anakin to become his pupil so as to learn how to prevent Padmé's foreseen death in cooperation, since Sidious had himself been the pupil of Darth Plagueis. There may well be more of the hand of the "gods" in Anakin's fall than might otherwise have been thought. This would give new, and even more ominous, significance to Palpatine's friendly remark to young Anakin after the Battle of Naboo: "we will watch your career with great interest."[43]

CONCLUSION: ANAKIN, "A MAN MORE SINNED AGAINST THAN SINNING!" (*KING LEAR*)

While tragedy may be "an unfashionable subject these days" the two sets of *Star Wars* trilogies offer a marked difference in mood largely because of the shift from the mythic or Jungian archetypes of the adventures of Luke Skywalker[44] to the plotting of the tragedy of Anakin Skywalker.[45] In an echo of the Oedipus tragedy, immortalized by the Greek tragedian Sophocles and formulated by Aristotle, Anakin becomes a tragic figure who attempts to escape "destiny" by taking his future into his own hands, but who nonetheless is fated to kill (here his surrogate father) Obi-Wan (although Padmé, of course, functions differently from Oedipus's mother). The *Star Wars* universe is now not conceived as a simple good-overcoming-evil scheme—in fact, it is questionable that *ESB* and *ROTJ* were as simple in this regard either, and there is an important question concerning how receptions of episodes V–VI have been distortingly dominated by the simplistic impressions received from *ANH*. Lucas seems to conceive of the nature of things as being particularly messy, from which no obviously harmoniously neat and glibly untragic story about it can be told. Thus, to tell the saga as tragedy is both to ask that a vastly different light be cast on the movies as a unity than that would occur if they were called "dualistic," and also unmasks the deeply "sentimental humanitarianism" in Anglophone culture.[46]

As Anakin attempts to crawl free from the lava on Mustafar, the monstrous picture of warped personhood is a profoundly tragic one of fall, loss, and waste (of self-control, limbs, friendship, family, the good counsel of the Jedi, potential for greatness, his own name, and the Republic's freedom), of brutal dehumanization [*ROTS*]. "Here is a guy who has lost everything,"[47] who is "cursed by the same flaws and issues . . . that . . . everybody struggles with,"[48] and who has done irreparable damage to the lives

of many (Padmé and the Temple's younglings lie slaughtered, the Republic has fallen into the hegemony of the Galactic Empire, and Anakin's twins are raised by others worlds apart from each other).

Certainly Anakin is flawed and his fall involves his actions (his intervention in Mace Windu's attempted execution of Palpatine/Sidious, his bowing to the Sith Lord, his brutal march into the Jedi Temple at the head of the 501st, and his murderous rage against Padmé and Obi-Wan). Yet Anakin's action against Mace and eventual backing of Palpatine/Sidious against the Jedi is a set of actions determined by some complex events. More particularly, he can be seen to act badly, ironically, for the very best of reasons. Admittedly he desires power, but out of a desire for "peace" and Padmé's safety. Yet the very pathway to "power," coming from making a Faustian pact to save Padmé, is itself tragically the direction that actually destroys her. He even acts out of a conservative loyalty to the Republic, and he naively and blindly trusts Palpatine to do what is right. In this he has been skillfully manipulated. Anakin thus comes to perceive the Dark Side not as evil but rather (wrongly) as a different/better way of achieving his *good* purposes for the peacefulness of the galaxy. He attempts to prevent arbitrary and summary justice without trial being exacted on Palpatine/Sidious, and yet in that moment of moral anxiety helps to destroy Mace in an act that finally leads him into the arms of Sidious and the obliteration of the Jedi Order. As Lucas suggestively comments, "Most of . . . [those who are wicked] think they're good people doing what they do for a good reason." So Obi-Wan can accurately lament to Padmé, "he was deceived by a lie, we all were" [*ROTS*].

What happens to the tragic hero is often called *nemesis* (punishment), and Anakin's "punishing" *metabole* (reversal of fortune) has many layers, each taking him deeper in his fall. But it is very clear that this *nemesis* is not the same as the receiving of some "poetic justice." Like Oedipus and Lear, Anakin's sufferings are disproportionately greater in scale than his vices. His tragic mistakes unleash something uncontrollable and overwhelmingly calamitous. What he is indeed guilty of is of being *blind to the truth of the situation*, of being a bad judge of the terrible reality played out behind his back as well as in and through him.[49] His is, as Jeffrey Overstreet sympathetically remarks, something of an understandable fall into wickedness:

> Lo and behold, Darth Vader did not strive to be a heartless villain. He became one by trying to protect the one he loved, going blind to the greater good in the process. The stakes are finally high enough to earn gasps, and the ensuing tragedy is almost Shakespearean.[50]

According to Poole, tragedy expresses "that we are connected, even interconnected, by complex systems of cause and consequence, in which questions of innocence and guilt are all caught up and embroiled, and from

which no one should expect to be exempted."[51] In being remade as "more machine . . . than man" [Obi-Wan, *ROTJ*] the eyes of the descending mask in which he becomes imprisoned invite us to view the world (through the camera underneath) with him. In this way, the story of Anakin is one to be feared. It is a story displaying the fragility of judgment, the vulnerability and deformability of the good life, depths of ignorance over the conditions that will harm rather than heal, of lives destroyed by a world uncontrollably "out of joint, that . . . [the world] is fundamentally indifferent or hostile to our efforts to achieve happiness, justice, and understanding, and hence that it is at odds with our deepest desires,"[52] and unmasking the irreparable shallowness and cheapness of doctrines of humanitarian progress.[53] "Tragedy," Peter Ahrensdorf argues, "should not offend the just hope that the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished, but it should beware of lulling us into a thoughtlessly complacent belief that justice is always done in the world and that the human condition is free from [unjust] suffering."[54] Anakin, the tragic figure who loses everything, is pitiable, a kind of every-person even with his midi-chlorian nobility.

NOTES

1. Gary Westfahl, "Space Opera," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 197–208 (197).

2. See Michael Kaminski, *The Secret History of Star Wars: The Art of Storytelling and the Making of a Modern Epic* (Kingston, Ontario: Legacy Books Press, 2008), 66, 213, 217ff.

3. Martin Scorsese, cited in John Baxter, *George Lucas: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 246.

4. Rowan Williams, *The Truce of God* (London: HarperCollins, 1983), 16.

5. Bryan P. Stone, *Faith and the Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema* (St. Louis, MS: Chalice Press, 2000), 5f.

6. Lucas, cited in John Seabrook, *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing—The Marketing of Culture* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 146.

7. Lucas, in *George Lucas: Interviews*, ed. Sally Kline (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 53.

8. For more on this, see John C. McDowell, "'Unlearn What You Have Learned' [Yoda]: The Critical Study of the Myth of *Star Wars*," in *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Terry R. Clark and Dan Clanton (London: Routledge, 2011), forthcoming.

9. See, for example, David Brin, "I Accuse . . . Or Zola Meets Yoda," in *Star Wars on Trial*, ed. David Brin and Matthew Woodring Stover (Dallas: Benbella Books, 2006), 17–48 (40).

10. See, for example, Kevin J. Wetmore, *The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion and Rebellion in the Star Wars Films* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2005),

96; John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), ch. 13; Mark Rowlands, *The Philosopher at the End of the Universe* (London: Ebury Press, 2003), 209. Manichaeism derives from the religious teachings of third-century Persian prophet, Mani, and is preeminently associated with cosmic dualism—a primordial conflict between light and darkness, good and evil.

11. Brin, "I Accuse," 40.

12. Like J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Lucas had conceived of *SW* as being part of a grand narrative recounted many years later. The *Journal of the Whills* "was meant to emphasize that whatever story followed came from a book," an inspirational piece of heroic folklore in a "holy book," Lucas, in J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars: The Definitive Story behind the Original Film* (London: Ebury Press, 2008), 14.

13. George Lucas, *Star Wars: From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker* (London: Sphere Books, 1977), 1.

14. Dale Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas, the Creator of Star Wars* (Hollywood, New York, London, Toronto: Samuel French, 1990), 189.

15. See Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), xvi. *Tragoidia* is Greek for "goat song," but the origins of Greek Athenian (or Attic) tragedy are obscure. Certainly, they were written for, and performed during, Athens' Dionysia (feasts for the god Dionysus) in late March; the subjects of the tragedies were the misfortunes of the heroes of legend, religious myth, and history.

16. Donald M. MacKinnon, *The Stripping of the Altars: The Gore Memorial Lecture Delivered on 5 November 1968 in Westminster Abbey, and Other Papers and Essays on Related Topics* (London: Collins, 1969), 42f.

17. Aristotle, cited in D. Daiches Raphael, *The Paradox of Tragedy: The Mahlon Powell Lectures 1959* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960), 13. Scholars commonly recognize that Aristotle is rejecting Plato's hostile view of tragic poetry as an unhealthy emotional stimulant and as morally misleading. Beyond that, interpretations of what is going on diverge substantially from a therapeutic homeopathy of the emotions, to stimulating the moral emotions.

18. Lucas, in *The Chosen One* featurette, *Star Wars: Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, directed by George Lucas, DVD Disc 2 (Lucasfilm Ltd., 2005).

19. Lucas, in Hugh Hart, "Flaws in a Good Heart," *LA Times.com* (January 20, 2002), www.latimes.com, consulted May 8, 2005.

20. Werner Jaeger observes that the fifth-century Athenians "never felt that the nature and influence of tragedy were purely and simply aesthetic," *Paedeia*, vol. 1, trans. Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939), 244f.

21. See George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 16f.

22. The "evil Empire" significantly arises from within the good old Republic itself. When one adds to this the backstory revealing that the Sith Lords were formed from expelled Jedi (dark Jedi), one recognizes that evil, or better *wickedness*, grows in and through the good, distorting it, never preexisting it but feeding off it parasitically. In a haunting line, Padmé laments, "so this is how liberty dies, with thunderous applause" [*ROTS*].

23. Peter T. Chattaway, "*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*," http://canadianchristianity.com/cgi-bin/na.cgi?film/starwars3, consulted June 30, 2005; Cf. Brin, "I Accuse," 5, 26.

24. The talk of the "midi-chlorians" in *TPM* upset many fans—Force-consciousness was being reduced to physiological conditions, it would seem. Interestingly, Lucas had already conceived of this soon after the release of *Star Wars* in 1977. See Lucas in Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars*, 441.

25. Carl Gustav Jung, "On the Nature of Dreams," in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 8, 293 (1974). Reprinted in Jung, *Dreams* (London: Routledge, 2001), 69–84 (80).

26. Stephen Halliwell, trans., *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (London: Duckworth), 1452b.34ff. However, in Sophocles's *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonius*, and Aeschylus's *The Eumenides*, the "change" is from misfortune to good fortune. Sophocles's *Antigone* and Aeschylus's *The Libation Bearers* move from misfortune to even greater misfortune. Sophocles's *Ajax* and Aeschylus's *Prometheus* portray *pure* misfortune (however, Aeschylus's plays are more akin to trilogies, which portrayed immense changes from misfortune to good fortune). Aristotle's is a sufficient observation only of Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* and *The Women of Trachis*, and Aeschylus's *Seven against Thebes*, *Persians*, and *Agamemnon*.

27. Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, ch. 14.

28. Brin, "I Accuse," 40.

29. Chris Baldick, "Hamartia," in *the Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 95–96 (96).

30. *King Lear* plays with the theme of awareness in the character of Gloucester, who equates his physical blindness with knowledge or insight and recognition, thus relating his earlier physical sight with his ignorance of the nature of things.

31. Hayden Christensen, in *Empire* magazine, June 2005, 88.

32. Critics who comment that Anakin has become an unlikeable character in *AOTC* and *ROTS* miss the point entirely, and fail to notice the link with the sullen, sulky, and whiny Luke of the first half of *ANH*.

33. Henry Sheehan, "*Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith*," www.henrysheehan.com/reviews/stuv/star-wars-3.html, consulted June 26, 2005.

34. See Matthew Stover, *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* (London: Century, 2005), 202f.

35. It equally echoes Luke's similar outburst against Uncle Owen's restricting him to farm-chores-before-fun [*ANH*].

36. Stover depicts Obi-Wan realizing the magnitude of just such a request to his former student (214, 215).

37. Stover, *Star Wars*, 224.

38. See Stover, *Star Wars*, 164.

39. *TPM* does not focus attention on any possible psychological effects on Anakin in having been a slave—he is later haunted by visions of his slave-mother's sufferings rather than his own. Nonetheless, the young boy's asking if Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn has come to Tatooine to "free" the slaves may possibly hint at the kind of desire for freedom that will feed Anakin's adolescent resentment of authority later when he is Padawan to Obi-Wan [*AOTC*].

40. Is the reason for the critics' shock over the Anakin of *TPM* a product of untested popular assumptions about "evil" and with an ignorance of classic tragic dramas rather than with the quality of Lucas's characterization in *TPM*?

41. "George Lucas: Mapping the Mythology," CNN, May 8, 2002, www.archives.cnn.com/2002/SHOWBIZ/Movies/05/07/ca.s02.george.lucas/index.html, consulted June 8, 2005.

42. Ian McDiarmid, in *The Chosen One*.

43. This reading makes sense in terms of Stover's presentation of Palpatine/Sidious urging Anakin, "understand who you truly are, and your true place in the history of the galaxy. . . . You are the chosen one. . . . Chosen by me" (291).

44. See John C. McDowell, *The Gospel According to Star Wars: Faith, Hope and the Force* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), ch. 1.

45. Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, ix. The reason for this, he claims, is largely that of the U.S.'s "profoundly antitragic culture . . . whose ideological orthodoxy regards skepticism as a thought crime and negativity as unpatriotic"; Eagleton, "Tragedy and Revolution," in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 7–21 (15).

46. Eagleton, "Tragedy and Revolution," 17.

47. Lucas, in *The Chosen One*.

48. "George Lucas Interview—The Story Comes First," January 15, 2002, www.starwars.com/episode-ii/bts/profile/f20020115/indexp2.html, consulted June 8, 2005.

49. This theme of distorted vision is symbolized by the fallen Anakin's eye-color change and his eventual looking through the armored mask.

50. Jeffrey Overstreet, "*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*," *Christianity Today*, May 18, 2005, www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/starwars3.html, consulted June 1, 2005.

51. Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 54f.

52. Peter J. Ahrensdorf, *Tragedy and Political Philosophy: Rationalism and Religion in Sophocles' Theban Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 151.

53. Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, 165: "For the conservative, monsters are other people; for the liberal, there are no monsters, only the mistreated and misunderstood; for the radical, the real monsters are ourselves."

54. Ahrensdorf, *Tragedy and Political Philosophy*, 174.

7

Under the Influence of Akira Kurosawa

The Visual Style of George Lucas

Michael Kaminski

A significant facet of the cinema of George Lucas is the influence of one of the greatest filmmakers, Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. Lucas drew upon Kurosawa's stylization, characters, visuals, and storylines when writing all of his *Star Wars* pictures, adding them to a melting pot of sources including everything from 1930s serials to pulp science-fiction novels. From the Japanese master's samurai epics he grafted onto *Star Wars* the Jedi, taking profound inspiration from those warriors of Japan's past and their codified martial lifestyle. It is also well known that characters from Kurosawa's *Hidden Fortress* were a main inspiration for R2-D2 and C-3PO. However, the relationship goes far beyond this once we examine the two directors in a fuller scope, particularly the visual component of Kurosawa, whose films Lucas was introduced to in film school by classmate John Milius.

Kurosawa had a warm relationship with the West. While 1950's *Rashomon* initially nonplussed the Japanese, it was the first Japanese film to win the Grand Prix at the Venice Film Festival, subsequently becoming an international hit. Kurosawa's films were always popular with cineastes in Europe and America; in the 1970s, when Japan turned its back on the director, overseas producers allowed him to continue to work. Those of Lucas's collaborative circle helped support Kurosawa or interacted with him in one way or another, including Lucas himself, though he does not appear to have had a close personal relationship in contrast to Scorsese and Coppola. Kurosawa's script supervisor and lifelong friend, Teruyo Nogami, devotes an entire appendix in her memoir to Kurosawa's contacts with those filmmakers of the 1970s. She writes that Kurosawa met John Milius on one occasion and praised his work, *The Wind and the Lion*.[1] She remembers how Martin Scorsese excitedly met Kurosawa on a mission to request

he sign a petition to improve film preservation standards; "Kurosawa had been bowled over by the man's cyclone-like power and energy," Nogami writes,[2] also that "Kurosawa and Scorsese were like family."[3] Kurosawa loved Coppola's films, too, remarking in 1975, according to Nogami, "That Coppola—what a director! I thought Part One of his Godfather series was perfect, and then he amazed me by surpassing it in Part Two."[4] Coppola frequently went to Japan with his family and "always made a point of having dinner with Kurosawa," Nogami remembers. "They remained close for a long time."[5] Of George Lucas, however, Nogami's description is rather cold. "George Lucas is a quiet man," she writes. "He often came to a shoot to watch Kurosawa in action, but said little."[6] Since Lucas produced the foreign version of *Kagemusha*, Lucas suggested omitting a scene, but Kurosawa remarked, "That's what I wanted to film, so let me do it my way."[7] Nogami notes that in 1981 she and Kurosawa visited Lucas's facilities in California and his staff demonstrated the computer systems they had developed, but "impressed though we were, we couldn't make head nor tail of it."[8]

Yet in spite of this personal and perhaps professional disconnect, the two filmmakers share much in common, apparent by studying the two in tandem. Born in 1910 in Tokyo, Kurosawa had a fascinating childhood, recalled vividly in his autobiography. Like Lucas, he had a strict upbringing, later shed for liberalism and the arts. While Lucas was born to a stern and conservative businessman father who instilled in his son a strong work ethic, Kurosawa hailed from a samurai family. His father had been a strict disciplinarian with strong military ties; tradition was honored in the Kurosawa family, and the young Akira developed an intimate reverence for the noble warrior class of Japan's past. He studied calligraphy and martial arts from an early age, recalling the many days trekking miles to practice Kendo at 5:30 a.m., stopping to traditionally pray in a Hachiman shrine before arriving at school at 8 a.m. As he grew older, Kurosawa emerged as a talented painter and hoped to pursue a career in that field. Here we find another similarity to Lucas, who entered the University of Southern California planning to study cinematography during the turbulent 1960s. Kurosawa likewise became increasingly involved with Japan's tumultuous political scene. He championed humanism and joined the socialist movement in 1929, first becoming a member of the Proletariat Artists' League, then actively taking part in secret underground groups before an arrest and increasingly frequent police raids dissuaded him. Even as a director he was a participant in the workers' strikes at Toho studios in 1948, during which the situation grew intense enough that the army had to be called in, using tanks to uproot the film crews who had turned the studio into a fortress.

This incident allows insight to the eventual films of Kurosawa. His was a social cinema, one politically motivated. His earliest work is mostly absent of the medieval setting and majestic pageantry of his famous samurai

epics; rather, they were contemporary dramas concerning the social ills of postwar Japan. What is lost on many casual viewers, and especially *Star Wars* fans who enjoy his later samurai films for their myth-like action, is that properly understood these period pieces were extensions of his earlier modern dramas. In searching for a way to comment on the state of postwar Japan, Kurosawa retreated into the past, using it as a mirror. Donald Richie observes *Yojimbo*'s pivotal moment in which a farmer's son is killed after choosing a life of crime: "Kurosawa has said many times that he considers his only audience to be that of the young Japanese: that is, it is these young people he is trying to reach. . . . [H]ere the message is both loud and clear. The dreadful town in *Yojimbo* is contemporary Japan and the choice of the farmer's son is one which confronts young people today."[9] Author Stephen Prince adds that Kurosawa's period films "announce a series of investigations into the meaning of the past, its structure and texture, and its relevance to the modern era."[10]

With his earliest cinema, Lucas too set out to construct films relevant to the issues of his time. Many of his student films had a social or political element, not surprising given that he experienced the liberal college scene of the mid-1960s. Most obvious is his 1965 short *Freiheit*, named after the German word for freedom, which portrayed a young man's attempted escape from East Berlin. "I was angry at the time, getting involved in all the causes," Lucas says.[11] "Of course, being a student in the 60s, I wanted to make socially relevant films, you know, tell it like it is."[12] His first feature, *THX 1138*, was a pessimistic reflection of the anxiety that gripped Vietnam- and Watergate-era America, using the future to comment on the present, where the populous has become drug-sedated consumers controlled by an authoritative government that has made individual expression illegal. With his next film, *American Graffiti*, Lucas employed the past rather than the future, utilizing a bygone era as a means of illustrating the innocence that the present generation had lost. "After the 1960s it was the end of the protest movement," Lucas says. "The drugs were really getting bad, kids were dying, and there was nothing left to protest. But *Graffiti* just said, *Get into your car and go chase some girls. That's all you have to do.* A lot of kids didn't even know that, so we kept getting all these letters from all over the country saying, 'Wow, this is great, I really found myself!'"[13] Lucas's cinema had undergone a fundamental change, the bleak cynicism that characterized *THX* now replaced with warm optimism. "I realized after *THX* that people don't care about how the country's being ruined," he later stated. "All that movie did was make people more pessimistic, more depressed, and less willing to get involved in trying to make the world better. So I decided this time I would make a more optimistic film that makes people feel positive about their fellow human beings. It's too easy to make films about Watergate."[14]

Star Wars, as he would call his next film, he meant to be a challenge to the gritty cinema of New Hollywood, a story meant to thrill and excite, to inspire and move. Like Kurosawa, Lucas continued to show an interest in reaching his country's youth. "My main reason for making it was to give young people an honest, wholesome fantasy life, the kind my generation had," he said at the time. "We had westerns, pirate movies, all kinds of things. Now they have *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Kojak*."[15] He comments further: "My first movie had been made in the streets, using absolutely nothing, and I thought before I retire I want to make one real movie—you know, on sound stages with sets, the way they used to make movies."[16] Kurosawa too had undertaken a similar transformation. Most of his films were of a rather serious nature, but he made a conscious choice to craft an audience-friendly commercial tale, his last contractual film for Toho studios. In 1945 he had filmed an adventure tale based on medieval Japanese plays and legends called *They Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail*. In 1958, now Japan's most powerful director, he had achieved the professional muscle to remake it with the scope and grandeur he had initially envisioned. The result was a fable-like adventure that remains as one of Kurosawa's most entertaining films: *The Hidden Fortress*. Kurosawa biographer Donald Richie described the film as a "romantic," "mythic," "adventurous," "operatic," and "fairy-tale,"[17] at the time Kurosawa's most expensive film but also his most financially successful.

It comes as no surprise then that the paths of Lucas and Kurosawa crossed at this career intersection. To fashion his own commercial fairy tale Lucas set about remaking *Hidden Fortress*, changing the landscape from post-medieval Japan to one rooted in science fiction. The result would be a fourteen-page story treatment first set to paper in April 1973. "*Hidden Fortress* was an influence on *Star Wars* right from the beginning," Lucas says in *The Making of Star Wars*. "I had some scenes—the cantina scene and the space battle scene—but I couldn't think of a basic plot. Originally the film was a good concept in search of a story. And then I thought of *Hidden Fortress*, which I'd seen again in 1972 or '73."[18] In 1973 there was no such thing as home video, so Lucas relied on a plot summary of *Hidden Fortress* found in Donald Richie's 1965 book, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, copying entire passages. For example, Richie describes the film:

> It is the sixteenth century, a period of civil wars. A princess, with her family, her retainers, and the clan treasure is being pursued. If they can cross enemy territory and reach a friendly province they will be saved. The enemy knows this and posts a reward for the capture of the princess.[19]

Lucas's 1973 treatment opens with a near-identical paragraph:

> It is the thirty-third century, a period of civil wars in the galaxy. A princess, with her family, her retainers, and the clan treasure, is being pursued. If they

> can cross territory controlled by the Empire and reach a friendly planet, they will be saved. The Sovereign knows this, and posts a reward for the capture of the princess.

As Jan Helander has noted,[20] this transcription-like technique is not representational of the entire treatment but highlights the profound influence *Hidden Fortress* exerted. Lucas included every single scene from *Hidden Fortress* in his treatment, including the characters, substituting a fourteen-year-old Princess Leia for a fourteen-year-old Princess Yuki, her protector General Skywalker for General Makabe, and a pair of bickering bureaucrats (later turned into robots named R2-D2 and C-3PO) for the comedic peasant duo Tahei and Matashichi. His first story treatment, then, was a literal remake only in the sci-fi vernacular; *Star Wars*' entire existence as we know it owes its lineage to that film.[21] In further tribute, Lucas later named his samurai-like warriors "Jedi," derived from the Japanese term "jidaigeku," which means period film. Lucas also lifted a scene from Kurosawa's *Sanjuro*, in which a samurai, here portrayed as General Skywalker, overhears a group of young men planning a raid and reluctantly decides to join them after they beg for help. Lucas dressed up this basic plot with additional elements and characters for his full-length screenplays starting in 1974, notably adding hero Luke Skywalker and villain Darth Vader, the monstrous Death Star space station and the mystical power of the Force. Cumulatively these led to a distinctly different film from Kurosawa's. However, Lucas also centered the plot around the protection of the secret Death Star plans, which now filled the role of the clan treasure the enemy is seeking in *Hidden Fortress*; rather than hiding gold inside sticks, unbeknownst to the pursuers, data plans are hidden inside R2-D2.

One of the closest links that remains in the final film is in the presence of the two droids, who even have similar dialogue as Kurosawa's Tahei and Matashichi, such as when they curse their "lot in life." Lucas has stated that the droids are the strongest tribute to Kurosawa's film.[22] He says further: "The part that was the most interesting in *Hidden Fortress* was that it was told from the point of view of the farmers, and not from the point of view of the princess. I like that idea. It set me off on a very interesting course because it really did frame the movie."[23] While toning down most of the scene-borrowings from *Hidden Fortress* in future screenplay drafts, Lucas added moments from another Kurosawa film. The cantina brawl in which men wanted from the law pick a fight with our hero and get diced up by a surprise sword attack is derived from a memorable scene in *Yojimbo*. While *Star Wars* does qualify as a unique work unto itself, similarities to *Hidden Fortress* remain strong enough that producer Gary Kurtz at one point suggested buying the rights to the film from Toho studios.[24] This might have been especially necessary since Lucas was hoping to have the equivalent to

Toshiro Mifune's character, Ben Kenobi, played by Mifune himself, which Lucas says would have then resulted in casting the princess as Japanese as well, heightening the similarities further.[25] Lucas even identifies the film in dialogue when Admiral Motti angrily informs Vader that Darth's devotion to his ancient religion has not "given you clairvoyance enough to find the rebels' *hidden fortress*."

Perhaps surprisingly, Lucas has cited *Seven Samurai* rather than *Hidden Fortress* as his favorite Kurosawa film. "It's a brilliant, brilliant film," he says. "It basically changed my life . . . in terms of understanding how cinema works and how to tell a very exciting story and still have it be very funny and very human."[26] Lucas continued to pluck story, characters, and thematic elements from the Kurosawa canon in later installments. A prototype for Yoda is found in the mystical character Dersu in Kurosawa's 1975 film *Dersu Uzala*, which also features an explorer who finds himself stranded in an arctic blizzard and is rescued by a companion who stuffs the freezing man's unconscious body in a pile of grass to survive the long cold night. A prototype for Luke's symbolic experience in the Dagobah cave appears in Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel*; here the protagonist, beckoned by a life of crime, experiences a vision in which he chops open a coffin with an axe only to discover himself inside. Darth Vader's redemption in *Return of the Jedi* is prefigured in *Hidden Fortress*. There the villain character, whose facial scarring resembles the unmasked Vader, turns on his forces and saves the heroes from execution. Lucas included this scene wholesale in his first screenplay from 1974 in the character of Prince Valorum. While holding brainstorming meetings for the writing of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in 1978, Lucas and Spielberg describe the hero archaeologist as being like Toshiro Mifune's samurai characters in Kurosawa's films. Even *Willow*, which Lucas co-wrote and produced in 1988, provides elements of Tahei and Matashichi in the two bickering "brownies" who accompany the main characters.

With 1999's *Phantom Menace* Lucas loosely remade *Hidden Fortress* once again. Like Princess Yuki, fourteen-year-old Queen Amidala is on the run from enemies who have invaded her kingdom, fleeing with her retainers (handmaidens and entourage) and a warrior who protects her like General Makabe. Lucas's first draft from 1995 left this to Kenobi, closer still to Kurosawa's film. In time, Lucas split this function into two Jedi, with a bumbling servant who tags along (Jar Jar Binks, crudely substituting for the peasant duo). This prequel sticks to some plot points closer than *A New Hope*: in Kurosawa's film, the General, princess, and peasants stop at a desolate town to barter for transportation, disguised as farmers, and unexpectedly end up buying a slave's freedom. There is also the use of royal body doubles, which fools the enemy. *Phantom Menace* contains a borrowing from the class division at the heart of *Seven Samurai* in the Gungan-Naboo dichotomy. In *Seven Samurai*, farmers distrust the samurai they have hired while the

samurai look down on the farmers; yet to vanquish their enemies they must put aside any such differences and fight together. This is accomplished by Toshiro Mifune's Kikuchiyo, a comic character who was the son of a farmer but joins the samurai, bridging the two sides and convincing them to work together. Lucas's parallel has the comedic Jar Jar Binks facilitating a union of the rival Gungans and Naboo for combat, the former who fancy themselves superior and the latter who contend their rivals untrustworthy. Bringing the connection into real-world terms, Lucas, at Francis Ford Coppola's invitation, served as executive producer on Kurosawa's 1980 breakthrough *Kagemusha*, securing financial backing to international versions of the film. Actually, Lucas may have briefly met Kurosawa even before this. Filmmaker Carroll Ballard recalls that Kurosawa once showed up at a party hosted in the offices of production company American Zoetrope around 1970.[27] Teruyo Nogami humorously notes that, when visiting Lucas in 1981, someone told Lucas that Kurosawa was there to collect a copyright fee for using the characters from *Hidden Fortress* in *Star Wars*. On hearing that, Kurosawa told Lucas, "No, no," and then smiled, "use them all you like."[28]

The scope and range of Kurosawa's influence on Lucas is clearly wide and varied, and Lucas cites Kurosawa as one of his primary cinematic influences.[29] One may consider themes commonly found in Kurosawa's films and draw parallels to Lucas's: the master-student relationship, frequently expressed in Kurosawa's early films through the powerful pairing of Takeshi Shimura and Toshiro Mifune; the dichotomy of illusion and reality; the division of classes and perspective of the commoner; government corruption and criticism of bureaucracy; the role of criminals in society; and the awakening of a hero. Like Lucas, Kurosawa was a student of history. One of *Seven Samurai*'s greatest contributions to the genre was its depiction of the samurai class in realistic and historically correct terms.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Kurosawa's connection to Lucas is the latter's stylization. "I'm not known for my dialogue," Lucas said with a laugh in 2005. "I think of it as a sound effect, a rhythm, a vocal chorus on the overall soundtrack. Mostly everything is visual."[30] His films often work because they speak to us at a direct, perhaps more primal, level, that is, through images. His sense of camera, of composition, of movement, are what define his work, as well as what elevates Lucas's films to a level of quality worth examining. We can trace his proficiency at each of these elements back to Kurosawa and so, once again, to understand Lucas on this level, we must first closely consider Kurosawa. It has been claimed that despite rating as Japan's most revered cinematic artist, he is decidedly un-Japanese. Many of his influences were Western, and his films reflect this. Standing in stark contrast to "traditional" Japanese masters like Ozu and Mizoguchi, Kurosawa's cinema is more visually dynamic, his frames filled with details, his lens frequently moving, his editing quick and lively. Most,

Kurosawa was a product of the silent age of cinema. Growing up in the 1910s and 1920s, these were the first films he saw; every week, his father, an ardent supporter of cinema, would take him to the local movie theater. There the young Kurosawa absorbed work from this pivotal era. His older brother, Heigo, wrote professionally about films and recommended the best to Akira, mainly American and European classics. Heigo, prototype for the mentor figure in his films, eventually worked in the movie business as a "benshi"; in Japan at that time these were actors who would narrate the silent cinema during projection and embellish the life of the images through running commentary and voice acting. Heigo's love of silent cinema bequeathed to Akira the same passion.

Not surprisingly, then, Lucas reflects, "I think he comes from a generation of filmmakers that were still influenced by silent films, which is something that I've been very interested in from having come from film school."[31] Kurosawa composed a list of all the movies he saw growing up, this included in his memoir over sixty years later.[32] In 1919, at the age of nine, Kurosawa saw *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and films by Chaplin, DeMille, and D. W. Griffith. At age eleven he saw Fritz Lang's *Dr. Malibuse*, at fourteen, Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*, and films by Carl Dreyer, Erich Von Stroheim, King Vidor, and Jean Renoir. In 1926, at fifteen, he saw John Ford's *Three Bad Men*, Lang's *Metropolis*, two films by F. W. Murnau (*Faust* and *Tartuffe*), plus Eisenstein's landmark *Battleship Potemkin*. This list should hardly be surprising as Kurosawa's films attain the same cinematic beauty and visually driven emotion that masters such as F. W. Murnau achieved in films such as *Sunrise*, which Kurosawa lists as seeing at age seventeen. Kurosawa's breakthrough work, 1950's *Rashomon*, includes a pivotal early sequence showing Takeshi Shimura wandering through the forest. The sequence runs for nearly four minutes, bereft of dialogue, and plays as if it were born from the fusion of Murnau and John Ford.

Ford, perhaps greater in influence even than silent cinema, is evident in Kurosawa's work, becoming especially heightened once Kurosawa began making period films involving dust-swept villages and bandits on horseback. "There is one person, I feel, I would like to resemble as I grow old: the late American film director John Ford," Kurosawa wrote in his autobiography.[33] "I have always paid attention to his films."[34] A prime reason for critics to deem Kurosawa's films "westernized" is their similarities to the cinema of Ford and Hollywood's golden era. He idolized Ford and studied the American western; it is no surprise that his two most famous films—*Yojimbo* and *Seven Samurai*—were remade into two seminal genre films, *Fistful of Dollars* and *The Magnificent Seven*. "Westerns have been done over and over again, and in the process a kind of grammar has evolved," Kurosawa once said. "I have learned from this grammar of the western."[35] His use of camera, with its long tracking shots, tension-driven editing, widescreen

composition, and dynamic movement, recalls the style of western directors such as Ford.

Also very much like Lucas, Kurosawa was interested in abstract visuals. His earlier films display an emphasis on natural, wide-angle photography with the camera placed close to actors to bring out the emotion in the most direct ways. But as his films drifted ever further away from subjective emotional identification into a colder, more intellectualized distance, Kurosawa found a means to visually convey his ideology. *Seven Samurai* is the transitional film, constructed in the vein of his earlier work, straightforward in its story, presenting strong, good-natured characters the audience is urged to identify with. For this reason it is often the favorite of his many samurai pictures, many of the later films lacking this perspective. Its audacious production, however, necessitated a certain practical camera technique. Because the action was immense in scale and involved many actors, stuntmen, animals, extras, and special effects, the setups were not easily repeatable. As a result, the traditional method of filming a scene—of using only one camera and filming an action again and again from different angles—could not be practically adhered to, which forced Kurosawa to use the multiple camera technique instead. This allowed him to film a complicated action sequence in one or two takes. In the most complicated sequences including the final rain-soaked battle, Kurosawa used up to five cameras, all shooting simultaneously.

To accommodate this, however, one must use certain lens and camera placement options. For example, because the other cameras capturing the wide shots would see them, cameras employed for close-ups and medium shots, instead of using wide- and medium-length lenses placed close to the action, instead had to be located far away and out of sight, the action necessarily captured with telephoto long-lenses. The visual effect of this was unplanned, but it would change—and define—Kurosawa's visual style. Long, or telephoto, lenses compress space, creating an image that is flat and two-dimensional. Distant objects do not look as if they are far from objects in the middle ground, while perspective and planes of geography are skewed. It is possible to maintain space relations, however, since one's area of focus—or depth of field—is compressed; objects in the background blur while those in the foreground become fuzzy and indistinct. As a result, the area in focus is narrow, or "shallow," giving the image some semblance of normal space relations. However, if a director shoots at high light levels, he is forced to work with a smaller lens aperture, creating a deep depth of field. Objects in the far distance are sharp and distinct while foreground objects do not become as blurred. When combined with the geographical compressing aspect of the telephoto lens, this effect can be striking; the planes of geography appear askew while objects in the background seem to be graphically stacked on top of those closer, eventually all space relations

disintegrating. Because *Seven Samurai* was mostly photographed outdoors in high light levels, the deep depth of field was maintained while shooting with telephoto lenses, resulting in the striking visual stacking noted above.

In a shot of the villagers in *Seven Samurai* gathered in a group, the appearance is normal, without undue depth compression. The image lays out what the geography of the environment essentially is. However, a cut to an intersecting shot using a telephoto lens results in something else entirely. Though separated and far apart, the figures visually appear to be stacked on top of one another in a flat, two-dimensional manner, the geography compressed. For Kurosawa, the main appeal of the telephoto lens was a rendering of everything in front of it into flattened geometric patterns that take on an abstract aspect, moving us away from realism in terms of what the audience finally sees onscreen, even if the subject matter in front of the camera remains of a realistic nature.

For Kurosawa, this proved to be a marvelous discovery. He had hinted at trying to achieve this effect in his earlier works; in *Ikiru* he used wider lenses but with such a deep depth of field that background objects become as sharp as those in the foreground ("deep focus," as it is known). However, with the use of long lenses in *Seven Samurai* he found an additional effect, the distortion of space.

This effect occurs via abstraction of the images. "It should surprise no one if I say that Akira Kurosawa knew all about movie cameras," his script supervisor of forty years, Teruyo Nogami, wrote in her memoir. "He would consult with his cameramen and decide the structure of every shot himself, peering through the viewfinder and selecting the proper lens."[36] From this point on, Kurosawa would shoot almost exclusively with long lenses and multi-camera setups. A by-product of this method was that it often placed the audience at a distance, forgoing emotional identification in favor of visual formalism. This would prove perfect for Kurosawa's ambitions as the content of his films underwent a parallel transformation, the optimism and character-based subjectivity of his earlier period giving way to dark pessimism and a detached distance. Such an approach reached its peak with 1985's *Ran*, his final masterpiece, made when Kurosawa was seventy-five, a film filled with bleak despair, both in content and form: as Kurosawa described it in the screenplay, "a Buddha in tears," filmed from the perspective of divinity weeping at the hopeless violence on Earth below.

Consciously influenced by Kurosawa or not, this is precisely how Lucas forged his own visual design. *THX 1138* is often criticized as an attempt at emotional storytelling that ultimately fails. A challenge to that assessment may be to regard the film as a piece of intellectual formalism that succeeds so greatly that it often becomes emotional. *THX* is told through design and camera, and Lucas, like Kurosawa, is attracted to a particular type of visual, interesting because it becomes so abstracted. How fitting then that Lucas,

who more often would rely on normal and wide lenses, photographed this early film in the exaggerated manner of Kurosawa. Almost every shot is composed to distort space and create an abstract quality, achieved by filming almost exclusively with long lenses. Lucas's professional work immediately prior to writing and directing this film was as a cameraman—he helped lens the *Woodstock* documentary, for example—and he served as cinematographer on *THX*, even writing a piece on the photographic aspects of the film for the industry trade magazine *American Cinematographer*. Lucas speaks in explicit terms of the photographic influence of Kurosawa:

> It's really his visual style to me that is so strong and unique, and again, a very, very powerful element in how he tells his stories. . . . He uses long lenses, which I happen to like a lot. It isolates the characters from backgrounds in a lot of cases. So you'll see a lot of stuff where there's big wide shots, lots of depth, and then he'll come in and isolate the characters from the background and you'll only focus on the characters. . . . You can't help but be influenced by his use of camera.[37]

In precisely this manner, *THX 1138* was shot and told, *in* and *through* visuals. Characters are scarcely developed; dialogue remains at an absolute minimum; exposition is nonexistent; emotional subjectivity is mostly denied. The camera remains at a distance, the images formalized and abstracted; we are rarely encouraged to identify with the protagonist on an emotional level. Lucas here employs close-ups more frequently than in any of his other films, even his greatest character successes of *Graffiti* and *Star Wars*. He frames characters so tightly to render them into abstractions through the sheer power of the telephoto lens. Conversely to Kurosawa, however, Lucas embraces the shallow depth of field that long lenses bring. Lucas's use of the telephoto lens to create shallow depth of field renders abstractions. In the rare instances where Lucas does use wide-angle photography, it is extreme, allowing the image to maintain the graphic distortion and abstract quality that his telephoto photography creates. One particular shot looking at Robert Duvall from the bottom of the speeder's windshield as he races through the tunnel is filmed from a fisheye lens, stretching the image in a fascinating if impossible way.

With the story expressed through photography, we note another parallel to Kurosawa: action. Stemming from the shared influence of the silent era—which truly was an action cinema, stories told almost exclusively by visuals and the actions contained in them—Kurosawa's and Lucas's cinema(s) create narratives that are likewise defined by action; movement through the frame, quick editing, and abstracted visuals render a dynamic series of events.

THX 1138 may stand as the best and truest example of the cinema of George Lucas, uninfluenced by outside forces and without regard for audience. Lucas

frequently speaks about how he remains an esoteric and experimental filmmaker at heart though his films betray this assertion; the *Star Wars* movies in particular are traditional narrative vehicles and big-budget Hollywood blockbusters. In *THX 1138* alone, we witness pure Lucas, including brief flashes of the quirky humor that would be put to great use in his later efforts (e.g., the malfunctioning police robot that bumps incessantly into a wall, satirizing the useless technology of the government). However, much like Kurosawa, Lucas's output would undergo a drastic change. Annoyed by the rejection and failure of *THX 1138*, Lucas deliberately set out to make a commercial film.[38] With this was born *American Graffiti*, a warm and funny character piece, one that left behind the abstract formalism of *THX* (if not completely), embracing subjective identification with characters. The film rated as a critical and financial hit, turning Lucas into a millionaire and putting him on the map professionally. Such success encouraged him to set his sights further down this path: to make a film even more commercial, more traditional—to emulate the studio pictures of Hollywood's golden era. With this, his visuals changed accordingly. The telephoto lenses gave way to medium- and wide-angle lenses; he brought forth the more traditional Ford-like method of photography. Here, Lucas's technique underwent the reverse metamorphosis from Kurosawa's, from formalism and abstraction to traditional and subjective.

Specific examples within the *Star Wars* films also derive imagery from Kurosawa; studying them allows for a fuller appreciation of this lineage. Lucas remarks on Kurosawa's technique: "The visual graphics, and the framing and the quality of the images, goes a long way to telling the story and setting the mood,"[39] much like the storytelling elements in his screenplays. Lucas borrowed from Kurosawa in a generalized, less-defined sense while also directly drawing on specific moments and compositions with surprising specificity. Kenobi's cantina brawl, as noted, originally came from *Yojimbo*. In that film, a wandering samurai has his way blocked by a gang of self-confessed wanted fugitives who provoke him. In a flash of rapid editing, the samurai's sword appears, men keel over, and in an insert shot we see a severed arm fall to the ground, weapon still in hand, transplanting the shots to *Star Wars* surprisingly faithfully.

Yojimbo spawned a 1962 sequel, *Sanjuro*, from which Lucas lifted a clever reveal composition for a scene onboard the *Millennium Falcon*. In *Sanjuro*, men search a house for fugitives but are stumped when they appear absent; only when the interlopers are gone do we see the other group's heads emerge out of removable floorboards that obscure the underground compartments in which they have concealed themselves.

We find a less obvious visual clue from Kurosawa in *Star Wars*' use of wipes, at the time a novelty. Wipes had been widely used in the early days of cinema but fell out of favor in the sound era, yet Kurosawa used them to great and aggressive effect in his films.

One of the most memorable compositional borrowings by Lucas is the sequence in which Ben Kenobi and Darth Vader face each other in a sword fight that, as author Will Brooker describes, follows a series of shots that "seems lifted in its entirety from *Hidden Fortress* and only minimally adapted."[40] The sequence follows the same pattern as the staff fight between General Makabe and General Tadokoro, two old nemeses who unexpectedly cross paths and partake in a duel. Each film's duel begins with a wide establishing tableau in profile, then follows a shot/reverse-shot rhythm as the swordsmen engage and advance on each other, climaxing in close-ups as their weapons cross diagonally across the frame.

Aside from the mysterious cave sequence derived from *Drunken Angel*, we also witness in *Empire* a visual homage to *Dersu Uzala* in Luke's rescue by Han Solo, as previously noted—though Lucas does not copy the composition and specific shots so literally. This is appropriate since Lucas neither directed *Empire Strikes Back* nor was present for the filming of these scenes. We find further borrowing from *Dersu Uzala* in much of the imagery on Dagobah, again in a less specific manner, compositionally speaking.

The final film of the trilogy, *Return of the Jedi*, contains liftings from Kurosawa as well. The speeder bike chase, originally done with horses in *Hidden Fortress*, again shows similar compositional qualities as two warriors battle side by side on horseback before one is thrown off headfirst. Lucas comments on the visuals and Kurosawa's use of camerawork for this specific *Hidden Fortress* scene in an interview conducted for Criterion's DVD of the film. While Lucas did not officially direct *Jedi*, he held a close watch on director Richard Marquand, selected some of the camera positions, directed both second unit and main unit scenes, and directed the storyboards for effects sequences like the speeder chase.

Returning in the role of director for the prequels, Lucas once more brought with him a plethora of references to the Japanese master. For starters, he almost exclusively employed the two-camera setup, just as Kurosawa did in his later, seminal period. *Phantom Menace* is also unique in that it contains many other techniques of Kurosawa's; this is perhaps Lucas's most overtly Kurosawa-influenced film, fitting since it's loosely based on *Hidden Fortress* and follows that film's plot more closely even than *Star Wars*. Aside from a significant lack of telephoto photography, *Phantom Menace* is otherwise visually composed so similarly to any of Kurosawa's later pictures, circa *Ran*, one might believe that Kurosawa himself during that period might have arrived at a film of similar compositional integrity. Emphasis is placed on the master shot, the action driven by editing and movement through the frame rather than via crane shots, steadicam or dollying, the case with most modern films. Also, there is a sense of stillness to the movie, resulting in an emphasis on composition.

Perhaps Lucas's long absence from direct behind-the-camera work explains why he had yet to develop—or redevelop—his own style, rather emulating that which he had studied and admired for years. With *Attack of the Clones*, his sophomore post-retirement effort, this emulation would be abandoned—compositional emphasis and a feeling of stillness here replaced with camera movement, dolly and truck shots, and more dynamic and modern techniques. Many took this as a sign that Lucas was stretching his directorial wings, bolstered by the cutting-edge distinction of this piece as the first major motion picture shot on high-definition video. Indeed, *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith* exhibit stylistic devices Lucas likely would never have used in *Phantom Menace*, from the handheld combat camerawork of *Attack of the Clones* to the dynamic and in-your-face digital cinematography displayed throughout the opening action sequence of *Revenge of the Sith*. One strong example is the opening, a *Lord of the Rings*–inspired fly-by; another, the shot of the separatist cruiser crash-landing, the craft rocketing from a distance, finally settling a few feet from the lens. The deliberately rigid formality in performance of *Phantom Menace*, a hallmark of late Kurosawa, was replaced by more expressive emoting in the sequels. However, though Lucas left behind the more overt Kurosawa references, in *Phantom Menace* many specific visuals still derived from that director.

First, many of the shots in the field battle involving the Gungan and droid armies are also present in *Seven Samurai*. One example is a shot of the droid tanks slowly emerging from the top of the hillside, directly copied from an image in which the bandits emerge from the Japanese mountains. Kurosawa's *Ran* would repeat many of these images as well.

The rolling hills of Naboo bear a striking resemblance to those of Japan, but specifically the imagery that Kurosawa dwells upon for the entire first quarter of *Ran*; thus it is no surprise to find these visuals abundantly in *Phantom Menace*.

In *Star Wars*, Toshiro Mifune's character from *Hidden Fortress* became Obi-Wan Kenobi; Lucas had speculated at one point about Mifune himself portraying Obi-Wan and pursued this casting at least preliminarily, though the role eventually went to Alec Guinness. In *Phantom Menace*, Liam Neeson portrays Mifune's character; Lucas visually dressed him in more explicit similarities, with long ponytail and distinct facial hair.

The image of the Gungan Army advancing from a shroud of mist is also an iconic image found in *Throne of Blood*. Lucas's film ends in a celebration, the final shot framed in the same manner as one of the final shots of *Hidden Fortress*.

Attack of the Clones would be less concentrated in Kurosawa influences. However, some of the imagery of the forbidden-love story draws from a similar conceit in *Seven Samurai*, particularly the image of the two young lovers amid a field of flowers.

The clone war battle also contains similarities to the two major battle sequences in *Ran*. In that film, color-coding plays a major role in identifying opposing forces while the onscreen sense of direction helps the audience orient themselves, thanks to alternating shots of armies rushing toward each other from the left and the right. In *Attack of the Clones*, the Republic often uses green (and blue) blaster fire and attacks that proceed from right to left while the villains employ red blaster fire and attack from screen-left to screen-right. This in itself was an inversion of the color-paradigm for the original trilogy; there the rebels used red blaster fire and often attacked screen-left to screen-right (see the Imperial Walker assault in *Empire*) while the Empire relied on green fire and usually attacked from the right. *Ran* also contains some shots that appear similar to ones featured in the clone war sequence, such as armies firing guns through a thick wash of smoke, the colored muzzle flashes all that is clearly visible.

Revenge of the Sith, however, would prove barren of explicit Kurosawa references, save for a nod to *Seven Samurai* as Yoda onboard a gunship strokes his head like Takeshi Shimura. This was apparently placed there by an ILM animator and not Lucas, indicating the gradual abandonment of Kurosawa in favor of a stylization that he had found himself. As the final directorial film in his career at the age of 60, it is perhaps fitting that this represents the total break from his mentor, paralleled by his own maturation as an original visual artist.

NOTES

1. Teruyo Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather: Making Movies with Akira Kurosawa*, trans. Juliet Winters Carpenter (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2001), 282.
2. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 181.
3. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 283.
4. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 284.
5. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 285.
6. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 285.
7. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 286.
8. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 286.
9. Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 151.
10. Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 202.
11. Dale Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* (New York: Harmony Books, 1983), 56.
12. Jean Vallely, "*The Empire Strikes Back* and So Does George Lucas with His Sequel to *Star Wars*," *Rolling Stone*, June 12, 1980. In *George Lucas Interviews*, ed. Sally Kline (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 89.

13. J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars: The Definitive Story behind the Original Film* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 63.

14. Stephen Farber, "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits the Big Time," *Film Quarterly* 27, no. 3, Spring 1974. In *George Lucas Interviews*, ed. Sally Kline (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 42.

15. "*Star Wars* The Year's Best Movie," *Time*, May 30, 1977, accessed August 8, 2011, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,914964,00.html.

16. Kerry O' Quinn, "The George Lucas Saga," *Starlog*, July 1981. In *George Lucas Interviews*, ed. Sally Kline (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 116.

17. Richie, *Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 134–39.

18. Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, 9.

19. Richie, *Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 134.

20. Jan Helander, "The Development of *Star Wars* as Seen through the Scripts by George Lucas," Starkiller: The Jedi Bendu Script Site, 1997, accessed August 8, 2011, http://starwarz.com/starkiller/2010/05/the-development-of-star-wars-as-seen-through-the-scripts-by-george-lucas.

21. As a thought exercise, consider how different the plot and characters would be if Lucas had remade *Seven Samurai* instead.

22. Laurent Bouzereau, *Star Wars: The Annotated Screenplays* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 9.

23. Bouzereau, *Annotated Screenplays*, 10.

24. John Baxter, *Mythmaker* (New York: Spike/Avon Books, 1999), 158.

25. Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, 69.

26. Marc Lee, "Film-Makers on Film: George Lucas," *The Telegraph*, May 14, 2005, accessed August 8, 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmmakersonfilm/3642010/Film-makers-on-film-George-Lucas.html.

27. *A Legacy of Filmmakers: The Early Days of American Zoetrope, THX 1138* DVD, Warners Entertainment, 2004.

28. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 286.

29. George Lucas interview, *Hidden Fortress* DVD, Criterion, 2001.

30. J. W. Rinzler, *Making of Revenge of the Sith* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 53.

31. Lucas interview, 2001.

32. Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, trans. Audie E. Bock (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 73–74.

33. Kurosawa, *Autobiography*, xii.

34. Peter Cowie, "Seven Rode Together: Seven Samurai and the American Western," in *Seven Samurai Eight Takes* (New York: Criterion Collection, 2006), 15.

35. Richie, *Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 147.

36. Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather*, 77.

37. Lucas interview, 2001.

38. Vallely, "*The Empire Strikes Back*," 90.

39. Lucas interview, 2001.

40. Will Brooker, *BBC Film Classics: Star Wars* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 53.

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8

Balancing the Force

How Media Created by *Star Wars* Now Defines the Franchise

Crystal Renee White

George Lucas's masterpiece, the original *Star Wars* trilogy, has created, through its extreme cultural impact, an empire of toys, movies and miniseries, video games, and books. The films pervade culture as movies that "changed everything."[1] Whether it was the special effects, the then-unknown actors who served as the cast, or the use of characters who embodied cultural archetypes that rang true for millions worldwide, *Star Wars* created a "mania" akin to the advent of the Beatles,[2] filled with endless merchandise and spin-offs that spawned the now infamous *Star Wars* "Expanded Universe" and the franchise's multiple levels of canonicity.

What these multiple levels create is a living, breathing, and organic mythology and story that continuously change as new characters are added in various merchandise schemes, new environments are created in movies, and new concepts are introduced throughout the entire spectrum, though exactly how this affects the integrity of the story as a whole is up for debate. There will certainly be fans who accept any new addition to the canon of the *Star Wars* universe, just as there will always be purists for the franchise who believe that new elements are only detrimental to the original story's vision. In fact, some critics note that the prequel movies, another form of media born from the original, have destroyed the "magic of the *Star Wars* mythology for many."[3]

A detailed examination of exactly how *Star Wars* has come to be an amalgamation of consumerism through four main branches of merchandise is required to clearly define how the story has changed, whether through toys, movies and television, and video games, or the large library of *Star Wars* novels, in effect seeing whether the Force still holds the magic that "binds

us and penetrates us" or whether the entire series has been reduced to a concentration of midi-chlorians.

Star Wars entered the toy market relatively early, with Kenner Toys buying the rights to make action figures based on the movies. However, the company unfortunately did not make the deadline of May 1977 in time for the movie's release, instead offering children an "Early Bird Certificate" or rather, an empty box with a certificate that children could use to redeem four figures later in 1978 when they finally released the action figures.[4] Unlike action figures of the 1960s, Kenner decided to produce the *Star Wars* toys at a 3.75-inch scale, making them even more collectible and easy to play with than the larger figures of the time. The first wave of toys included main characters such as R2-D2, Princess Leia, Luke Skywalker, and Obi-Wan Kenobi, with more waves in 1978 producing more characters.[5] The popularity of the toys continued to grow, with more figures added as the later installments, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983), were released. The toy line has been so successful that "Kenner's *Star Wars* action figures are thought to have been key in reestablishing the value of media tie-in products in the toy industry,"[6] and considering that toy production for the saga has not ceased since the beginning of the franchise, this would seem indicative of the toy line's success. The toy line was so successful, in fact, that, "by the late 1980s *Star Wars* related toys had grossed an estimated $2 billion, and had helped to reshape the toy industry by moving fantasy action figures to its very centre."[7]

The revenue and influence generated by the toy line became undeniable when the popularity of a single figure spared the life of a major character in *Return of the Jedi*. Gary Kurtz, a producer who worked with George Lucas during *Empire* and *Jedi*, admits, "The original idea was that they would recover Han Solo in the early part of the story and that he would then die in the middle part of the film in a raid on an Imperial base. . . . George then decided he didn't want any of the principals killed. By that time there were really big toy sales and that was a reason."[8] Changes such as this, along with several others that significantly lightened the tone of *Jedi*, caused Kurtz and Lucas to part ways over creative differences.[9] Kurtz disliked the overly happy ending, with the hero Luke being Vader's savior and conquering his destiny rather than Luke walking off thoroughly defeated. This change was just one instance of Lucas's tendency to change the series based on merchandise and revenue, though it would not be the last time this would happen.

Lucasfilm also used toys as a means to integrate many forms of media into one cohesive event, for example, combining a novel, comic, and video game under the single title *Shadows of the Empire*. The *Shadows of the Empire* project covered the period of time between *Empire* and *Jedi*, exploring Leia's search for Han while encased in carbonite, Luke's self-exploration in the Force and creation of his lightsaber, and rise of a new character,

Prince Xizor, who aims to take Darth Vader's place at the right hand of the Emperor. While these other forms of media were equally important in this project, and will be touched upon later, the influence of the toy industry in the entire endeavor is truly great and helped to tie everything together, in effect allowing the toys as well as other media to create a new chapter in the *Star Wars* legacy.

In 1996, Hasbro released "five basic figures for *Shadows of the Empire*, Chewbacca (Bounty Hunter Disguise), Princess Leia (Boushh disguise), Dash Rendar, Luke Skywalker (in Imperial Guard armor) and Prince Xizor,"[10] thus tying in major characters from the new novel with preexisting favorites and giving the entire cast a new story. Hasbro also created "Boba Fett's Slave I related to the project and two new vehicles, Dash Rendar's Outrider and Swoop Bike with Swoop Trooper. In addition, two value packs were released under the Shadows of the Empire name: Boba Fett and IG-88, and Darth Vader and Prince Xizor."[11] This would be one of many instances in which the *Star Wars* toy lines echoed new media being introduced to the story.

Hasbro also capitalized on the entire *Star Wars* Expanded Universe, grabbing characters from sources other than the movies yet again, drawing from comics and novels in particular,[12] though arguably the toys played the biggest role in new media when they released the new line for the prequel trilogy. With the advent of an entirely new part to the *Star Wars* story, the toys had to follow suit, working to create a bond between old and new characters. A "flashback photo" set, having figures with references to their episode I counterparts allowing consumers to accept the connections before the film came out in May of 1999, continued with Commtech chip figures that even appeared to speak dialogue from the new movie. Hasbro continued to integrate its toy line with the new prequels, even as they spiraled out in even more media, like the *Clone Wars* cartoon and the 2008 animated *Clone Wars* movie.

With so much power behind the Kenner and Hasbro toy lines, and the integration of the toys with the ever-increasing *Star Wars* universe, one might believe that this force alone could be enough to spur interest in the series from its creation in 1977 until now, but that is hardly the case. While *Star Wars* has become notable for its vast toy lines, a plethora of media supporting the saga have also emerged, and the addition of new movies and television also vastly helped the popularity and growth of the *Star Wars* universe.

In 1999, after an almost twenty-year gap between movies, George Lucas released the first of three new *Star Wars* films with *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith* releasing in three-year increments. Notably, "despite an almost two-decade gap between the release dates for *Return of the Jedi* and *The Phantom Menace*, Lucasfilm continued to generate

profits from its *Star Wars* franchise through the production of original novels and comic books, the distribution of video and audio tapes, the continued marketing of *Star Wars* toys and merchandise and the maintenance of an elaborate publicity apparatus."[13]

This fact serves as further proof that even before the coming of the prequels, the *Star Wars* merchandise wave had already served well in preserving the life of the series, allowing other media to take over while the movies took a hiatus. While many fans expected these prequels to finally answer the questions of Vader's origin, they also changed the way many people perceived *Star Wars* entirely, from the universe's look and feel, to relationships between characters, and even to the change in the overarching hero's journey. The hero's journey is arguably the most important part of the story, and yet these movies changed much of it.

Once the downfall of a young Anakin had been introduced, the story spanning all six movies became one of the rise of Anakin Skywalker and his fall into becoming Darth Vader, rather than the story of the young farm boy Luke who eventually saves the galaxy. The prequels essentially turned themselves into the story of Oedipus, depicting the eventual Vader as a young man whose tragic flaw was his pride and desire to change his fate at any cost, rather than some monstrously evil personality from the very beginning.[14] In fact, this transformation from a young and innocent boy to the most feared evil in the galaxy over the course of just three movies often led to a disconnect between fans and the character. Many felt that they just couldn't understand how someone so good could do such evil, changing the perception of Darth Vader for years to come.

Star Wars as a whole has now become more about Anakin, with Luke's character falling by the wayside, changing who is the true hero of the story. The downfall of the Republic itself changes entirely by the inclusion of the Jar Jar Binks character, who ultimately gives then-chancellor Palpatine emergency powers of the Senate to reign freely. Rather than perhaps being perceived as a takeover of brute strength, now the downfall of the Republic might be summed up as a mistake by a relatively minor character. Even minor inconsistencies affect the integrity of the original trilogy itself, with small remarks like Obi-Wan stating that Yoda was his master in *Empire* later disproven by the inclusion of Qui-Gon Jinn in the prequels.

Of course, one of the biggest changes in the *Star Wars* mythos is that of the Force. While described in the original trilogy as simply being a life force that exists in all things, the prequels boil the Force down to the ability to communicate with small germ-like symbionts that then communicate back the will of the Force. This makes the ability to determine who is worthy to become a Jedi as simple as a blood test at the doctor's, taking away a significant amount of magic from what used to be a more mysterious version of the Force. Between adding characters, worlds, and Anakin's sometimes

hard-to-sympathize-with descent into darkness, and changing details of essential events such as the Clone Wars themselves (noting that Obi-Wan did not actually serve under Bail Organa as Leia's famous hologram would suggest, but rather the Jedi Order itself), the prequels added a vibrancy and new life to the *Star Wars* universe, but not without the price of casting a shadow on the original. These changes would go on not only to affect how the original trilogy is perceived, but also how the future of *Star Wars* is written, particularly in the Expanded Universe novels, and would also change what is ultimately considered canon to the story.

The prequels were not the only broadcast-related media to change the *Star Wars* continuity. To add to the prequel fervor, Lucasfilm released *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* in 2008, a series that was a continuation of Cartoon Network's older *The Clone Wars* and a series that later produced a tie-in movie also titled *The Clone Wars*. This 2008 series introduced multiple missions that both Obi-Wan and Anakin embark upon, in order to flesh out the years between *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. In addition to cementing the bond between the two characters, *The Clone Wars* series also introduced a Padawan learner for Anakin, by the name of Ahsoka Tano.[15] The mere existence of the character complicates the continuity of the prequel trilogy and the character of Anakin himself. Had Anakin successfully trained a Padawan who then went on to become a Jedi Knight, Anakin would have been granted the rank of Master by the council. Since part of his downfall in *Revenge of the Sith* includes his anger at not being promoted to such a level, it must be inferred that this Padawan did not become a Knight, but instead must have left the order or been killed. Anakin's Padawan dying during a mission would help to explain even further his fear of death pertaining to loved ones and his need to control such forces. Since the series is still running, we have yet to learn the fate of Ahsoka, though it most certainly changes the character of Anakin in terms of continuity, despite not being part of the live-action films.

The multitude of *Star Wars* video games also explore unknown territory for established characters. Many *Star Wars* video games have often introduced new characters or unnamed characters to create new stories and adventures, such as those of the Gray Jedi in games such as *Knights of the Old Republic*, or of any of the nameless Rebel fighter pilots in the *Rebel Assault* games. However, an occasional game would fall during periods already covered by the original movies, or leading up to them, and would include well-known characters in order to expound upon their story. One such example would be the 2008 release of *The Force Unleashed*. This game covers the period between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*. The game focuses on Darth Vader's secret apprentice, Galen Marek, a young man whom Vader uses to track down some of the last remaining Jedi in order to kill them.[16] Vader uses this apprentice first under the guise of helping him

overthrow the Emperor, and finally being freed of him. In the game, Vader then pretends to kill Marek in order to prove his loyalty to the Emperor, while secretly using the apprentice to gather detractors of the Empire, thus forming the original Rebel Alliance.[17] However, this too is a lie, and Vader really uses the apprentice to gather these leaders to take them out in one fell swoop. Instead of giving in, Marek sacrifices himself in a battle against both Vader and Palpatine, with his death being the ultimate inspiration for the Rebels, his family crest even used as the symbol of the new Alliance. Thus, this video game's foray into undefined territory has now established that Darth Vader himself unwittingly caused the creation of the very Alliance that would eventually overthrow him, providing more insight as to the character Vader had become, his resentment toward Palpatine, and even as to the fulfillment of the original prophecy regarding Anakin: that he would "bring balance to the Force." While previously it might have seemed that it was truly Luke accomplishing this by overcoming the Empire, now it seems that Vader truly does have more influence in the downfall of the Dark Side outside of the last few minutes of *Return of the Jedi*, and would indeed fulfill the original prophecy. *The Force Unleashed* again changed the canonicity of the *Star Wars* universe forever.

Perhaps even more effective than the movies, television, toys, and video games related to *Star Wars* would be the vast amount of literature about the series. There are literally hundreds of books and comics about the *Star Wars* universe, ranging from thousands of years before the Battle of Yavin to hundreds of years afterward. These books established new characters, added depth to organizations like the Jedi Order, and occasionally gave added darkness or even resolution to the end of the *Star Wars* story. As previously mentioned, titles like *Shadows of the Empire* helped to fill in missing pieces between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. The book not only introduced new characters to the canon, but helped to better establish characters like Leia, her feelings toward Han, and her misery at being unable to stop him from being encased in carbonite.

While many of these books did simple things like provide additional character development, others drastically changed the tone of *Star Wars* and gave some characters the chance to do things the movies never allowed. One such example occurs with the redeemed Anakin's multiple appearances as a Force-ghost in the novels, allowing him finally to make amends with his daughter Leia. In the novel *The Truce at Bakura*, which takes place mere days after the destruction of the second Death Star, Anakin's spirit appears to Leia to beg forgiveness, which she cannot give at that time, having only just learned of her lineage,[18] the two eventually coming to terms in later books.[19]

Leia's character and the entire Skywalker family have the opportunity to live out much grander tales than the original stories ever afforded them as

well, from the true courtship and eventual marriage of Leia to Han in *The Courtship of Princess Leia*,[20] to her training in the Force.[21] While we receive mere hints at Leia's Force abilities in weaker examples in the original trilogy, the Expanded Universe shows that Leia's Force powers do indeed develop and help her frequently.[22] The novels also add many more descendants of the Skywalker family, which is where the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe really takes a turn into unexplored ground.

The story as a whole takes a much darker turn in the Expanded Universe, notably with the deaths of several main characters, adding a sadness to the series that the original trilogy barely conceived of, and once again changing the fate of these characters in ways that would have never occurred without the addition of so much media to the *Star Wars* franchise. Throughout the books, more of the Skywalker family is added, with the Solo twins Jacen and Jaina, and their little brother, Anakin, as well as Luke's son, Ben. While this starts out in a joyous manner, the fate of these additional children certainly creates a brand-new era for *Star Wars*. All of these children train as Jedi within Luke's new Jedi Academy,[23] but that doesn't mean that their lives are without conflict. Anakin, the youngest of the Solo children, inadvertently plays a role in the death of fan favorite Chewbacca, something for which his father Han barely forgives him. Later, Anakin dies in a war-related incident, causing immense grief throughout the Skywalker and Solo clans. This event eventually allows Jacen, Anakin's older brother, to begin his path to the Dark Side, eventually taking the name Darth Caedus, while his sister Jaina becomes a reckless starfighter for a time.[24] The Expanded Universe spans hundreds of years, even creating descendants many generations removed such as Kol and Cade Skywalker, two decidedly darker characters. Of the two, Cade is a bounty hunter in addition to a Force user, changing the Skywalker family from the previously pure duo of Luke and Leia into a much darker family line.

Organizations in the Expanded Universe novels also change extensively, with the rebuilding of the Senate, the dissolution of the Galactic Empire and the Rebel Alliance, and the addition of the newfound Galactic Alliance. These institutions imply a time of peace and cooperation in the *Star Wars* galaxy, though it would not remain without conflict.[25] The Jedi Temple from the prequels is also resurrected in a way with the foundation of Luke's Jedi Academy on Yavin Four, though the Sith organization also comes back to life with the Shadow Academy.[26] From what might have seemed a simple resolution at the end of *Return of the Jedi* spirals a never-ending struggle to maintain peace in the galaxy, showing that defeating the Emperor was nearly the least of Luke's worries.

The Emperor himself becomes an interesting subject in the Expanded Universe, coming back in multiple incarnations through either sheer force of will with his evil spirit, or actually cloning his body and transferring his

essence into a new host Palpatine.[27] One must wonder whether the continual cloning of the Emperor in fact inspired the cloning facilities in Kamino from *Attack of the Clones* and perhaps also inspired Palpatine's claim in *Revenge of the Sith* that he had learned how to create life through the Force. While the only true answer likely lies in Lucas's head, if the Expanded Universe's cloning did indeed inspire some of the prequels, it would be a perfect example of how the canon of *Star Wars* has often used its future to write its past, and back again.

Undoubtedly, the toys, films, television, video games, and books related to the *Star Wars* franchise have changed a lot about the universe. The prequels changed the past, influencing how many fans viewed the original trilogy and beyond, and the novels often changed the future, allowing the reflection to go backward, while much of the other media filled in the blanks in the middle. With this huge amount of information, it was necessary to create an archive of all the various story lines, and also to create multiple levels of canon in order to establish what media would take precedence over what. Lucasfilm has titled this database the "Holocron," a collection of the entirety of the *Star Wars* universe, kept secret from the public as it also contains information pertaining to projects that are still in development.[28] However, certain pieces of information are available and allow fans to understand the multiple levels of canon and how they affect the story as a whole. The Holocron, as created by Leland Chee, has multiple levels. G-canon is everything included in the most recent releases of the movies, and they can override any other level of canon. This includes scripts, novelizations, and radio plays of the movies. T-canon refers only to the television shows *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* and the possible live-action television series. These take precedence over C-canon, which includes the Expanded Universe books, comics, games, and RPGs. All backstories in this canon are considered canon elements, though a few items and other small parts of various games may be considered N-canon. S-canon is considered non-continuity, with the exception of non-contradicting parts, and covers games like the online *Star Wars: Galaxies*. N-canon is non-canon, and covers "what-if" scenarios such as *Star Wars: Infinities* and crossovers. This level is considered completely non-canon by Lucasfilm, and much information in C-canon became N-canon after the release of the prequels,[29] whose canon overrides any contradicting information, as with every official film.[30] Despite the multiple levels of canon and their competing authenticity, Lucasfilm licensing editor Sue Rostoni maintains that "Canon refers to an authoritative list of books that the Lucas Licensing editors consider an authentic part of the official *Star Wars* history. Our goal is to present a continuous and unified history of the *Star Wars* galaxy, insofar as that history does not conflict with, or undermine the meaning of Mr. Lucas's *Star Wars* saga of films and screenplays."[31]

The mere fact that *Star Wars* has multiple levels of canon is testament to the sheer volume of spin-offs and mass amounts of media generated by the franchise. What once started as George Lucas's desire to shoot a frame-for-frame space remake of *The Hidden Fortress* has spiraled into a multi-million-dollar business. The story that began so simply as "cowboys in space" quickly generated a life of its own through the consumerism that would follow, allowing the media that *Star Wars* once created in turn to create *Star Wars* itself. All of this information leads back, however, to the initial question of whether the media that is now creating the franchise itself is to the detriment of the original trilogy and whether it has lost its spark. Arguably, the biggest change to the original trilogy occurred during the addition of the prequels, therefore allowing the character of Anakin almost to overshadow Luke. Once the prequels are added into the canon, the entirety of the original trilogy now simply becomes a story about the redemption of Anakin instead of the adventures of his son, changing the hero's cycle from Luke's to Anakin's. Now, Luke serves as more of an instrument of his father's redemption than his own independent character. Additionally, the original *Star Wars* trilogy provided the audience with a rather simplistic sense of good and evil, that the Empire and Vader were evil, save for a slight bit of good discovered in him at the end, and that the Rebels were the heroes. When viewed in the context of the prequel trilogy as part of G-canon, we can see that the entire creation of the Empire is really more a doing of the Emperor and that Vader is just a pawn, providing more sympathy for him, and in effect almost neutralizing his role as a villain in the original trilogy.

Again, the original trilogy vastly changes when taking into account the prequel trilogy's view on the Force when the audience views the original knowing that midi-chlorians are really the only prerequisite to use the Force. Once a viewer knows this, and therefore knows Luke's lineage by virtue of the prequels, there is no longer any anticipation of whether Luke will become a Jedi—at this point, it's simply genetics and a matter of time before he will, and his struggle to control the Force is no longer an obstacle. Even the aforementioned downfall of the Empire is reduced to the mistake of Jar Jar Binks, without whom Palpatine may have not even gained control of the Senate. In a way, this makes the all-powerful Empire in the original trilogy, once compared to the Nazis, seem relatively tame and underhanded, rather than brutally strong.

The prequels are not the only media to affect the original trilogy. While all of the media generated by the original *Star Wars* trilogy in some way affects the canon or perceptions of the original, the Expanded Universe in the novels is one of the biggest forces to rock the original movies. The Expanded Universe has shown through numerous books that although Luke "destroys" the Empire, it does not remain gone for long, with continual

conflict in the galaxy and the formation of the Shadow Academy almost nullifying the efforts made by Luke and the Rebels. The aforementioned deaths of several main characters during ensuing conflicts can also make a viewer of the original trilogy question whether the resolution is sincere, knowing that the future will be grim, ruining the complete cycle of Luke's journey by stating that he did not, in fact, truly defeat "evil" and that his family would simply pay the price later. Even the assumption that Luke had defeated his inner darkness and risen above his father's mistakes in the original trilogy are destroyed by the inclusion of the Expanded Universe, which reveals that at one point, in an effort to defeat a newly discovered Palpatine clone, Luke gave himself to the Dark Side for a time.[32] When such a mistake by such a "pure" character reflects back upon the original trilogy, it makes Luke seem relatively lucky in his struggle with the Dark Side in the original trilogy, rather than morally strong.

In essence, the entirety of the *Star Wars* canon does create a much deeper and multifaceted mythology and story than the original trilogy could have ever conceived of, and with books spawning more books, and movies producing video games, and toys producing characters that would also be movies and books, the creation of *Star Wars* is an endless cycle. But when one looks at the entirety of the *Star Wars* story, the significance and magic of the original is lost. What good is Luke's journey if it only ends in a foray into the Dark Side and the death of multiple members of his family later? What good is destroying the Empire if it merely resurrects itself with a cloned leader? How evil is Darth Vader if he was truly a victim? Where is the mystery of the Force if you can get an easy blood test to determine your aptitude? While some of the stories produced from the original trilogy provide useful character development and fill in blanks in the plot, when looked at under the scrutiny provided by literally hundreds of additional stories, the original story of a young farm boy who fights against evil and wins fails to hold up under the crushing weight of the very universe it created.

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9

A Long Time Ago on a Newsstand Far, Far Away

The Mythic Comic Book Hero in Marvel Comics' *Star Wars*

Jon Hogan

Film scholars such as Stuart Voytilla wrote about popular motion pictures as embodying the structure of Joseph Campbell's monomyth.[1] One such film is George Lucas's *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*. Lucas modeled his story around the characters and situations that are archetypical to mythology. The narrative is still mythic whether told in film or not.

With that in mind, we can gain much insight into mythic storytelling by studying the mythic content of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* when told in other media. One such example comes in Marvel Comics' *Star Wars* series. The popular series explored the further adventures of Luke Skywalker and his companions for 107 issues, lasting from 1977 to 1986. While the series focused on events outside of the films, writer Roy Thomas and artist Howard Chaykin used issues one through six to adapt the first film in the series. The comic book is an excellent medium for the telling of such a mythic story. Certain aspects of comic book storytelling can enhance a narrative's mythic qualities. A prime example of this comes with the relationship between the comic book superhero and the mythic hero. The more a character has in common with the typical costumed superhero, the more it resembles the mythological protagonist. This connection is used in the comic book adaptation of the first *Star Wars* film. Thomas and Chaykin bolster the mythic nature of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* by showing the story's heroes to be comic book superheroes.

The *Star Wars* series' connections to mythology have never been a secret. From the time of the first film's release, critics commented on the film's borrowing of mythic structure. In September 1978, over a year after episode IV was released to theaters, Andrew Gordon commented, "Lucas created a myth for our times, fashioned out of bits and pieces of twentieth-century

American popular mythology—old movies, science fiction, television, and comic books—but held together at its most basic level by the standard pattern of the adventures of a mythic hero."[2] Here the importance of the mythic structures becomes apparent. Lucas cobbled his narrative together with pieces of other entertainments. The one common bond among these entertainments was their appropriation of mythic elements. Without the overriding importance of myth to Lucas's narrative, this synthesis would not have been possible.

In particular, mythology made it possible for Lucas to mimic and homage elements of comic book fiction in *Star Wars*. This is due to the long-discussed connection between comic books and mythology. There is a wealth of research involving the relationship between the two. Using different frameworks of analysis, many different observations regarding this relationship have come to light.

One of the first observations involves the modern platforms for telling mythological stories. A variety of media is available for modern tellers of mythology. Literature, film, and popular music have brought in recent years stories of ancient mythology to larger audiences. The literature on comic books and mythology also shows that comic books are effective means of retelling ancient myths. In particular, Blackmore discusses Frank Miller's *300*.[3] It functions as a retelling of the historical myth describing a battle between Persians and Spartans at Thermopylae. While this myth had been told on multiple occasions since its initial telling in Herodotus's *Histories*, Miller pursues a new and unique means of bringing the myth to a modern audience. Likewise, sequential art in general can act as an engaging means of presenting ancient mythologies to the people of today.

While comic books can act as an engaging way of retelling older mythic stories, they also present the mythology of modern society for the first time. Much of the research into comic books and mythology discusses comics as the present-day venue for creating and presenting mythic stories. Reynolds attributes the mythic nature of comic books to one of the chief characteristics of comic storytelling: continuity. Continuity is the ways in which the continuing adventures of a superhero make sense in relation to each other. When a development from a story written in 1978 affects a Batman story written in 2010, this is continuity at work. Reynolds sees it as key to comics' status as mythic discourse.

> Continuity . . . is the strategy through which superhero texts most clearly operate as myths. Continuity provides the interaction with the audience which characterizes mythological discourse: myths, like music, have been characterized by Levi-Strauss as "machines for the suppression of time," the contemplating of the unity being more important than any suspense engendered over the outcome.[4]

Reynolds uses Levi-Strauss's definition of myth, which describes mythology as a means of creating unity in time. The continuity of comic books makes stories during any point of a superhero's adventures inextricably linked with the adventures that precede and follow. All of these stories form a cohesive unit that would not have the same meaning without the presence of each tale. In this sense, continuity provides the unity of time that fits into Levi-Strauss's understanding of the mythic.

Another factor of the mythic nature of comic books centers on the protagonists of these tales. The comic book hero is often discussed as today's mythic hero. As Harris explains,

> When we encounter a hero of extraterrestrial origins, gifted with miraculous powers, overcoming enormous dangers, defeating stereotyped villains, enjoying universal recognition, and mouthing phrases which embody basic social, religious, and political values, we are probably meeting up with a mythic hero.[5]

Here Harris lists many traits common to comic book heroes, describing their attributes, adventures, adversaries, and values. He then links these traits to those of the mythic hero. Since they both have similar characteristics and perform similar feats, Harris posits the comic book hero as the modern-day mythic hero.

After displaying all of these characteristics, the comic book hero must pass other tests to be considered a mythic hero. One of the most important tests involves the hero's relationship with his or her audience. A certain degree of audience acceptance comes with the status of mythic hero. As Boehm explains, "Superman had achieved the status of an American icon, a figure of mythic proportion, due to popular devotion."[6] Boehm equates the adoration of the masses with mythic stature. While Harris would claim that a laundry list of characteristics must be met to qualify status as a mythic hero, popular devotion is another means by which a normal comic book hero transcends to the mythic.

Another test of whether the comic book hero is truly mythic deals with what the character represents. As stated earlier, mythology is rife with archetypes. Multiple elements of the story must be fixed, easily recognizable elements inherent in the collective consciousness. Logically, one of these archetypical elements is the protagonist of the myth. However, as Eco notes, the comic medium creates a particular problem in this aspect of the mythic hero.

> The mythological character of comic strips finds himself in this singular situation: he must be an archetype, the totality of certain collective aspirations, and therefore, he must necessarily become immobilized in an emblematic and fixed nature which renders him easily recognizable (this is what happens to Superman); but since he is marketed in the sphere of a "romantic" production

> for a public that consumes "romances," he must be subjected to a development which is typical, as we have seen, of novelistic characters.[7]

The audience's expectations of the comic book hero center their consumption of "romantic" stories. In describing stories as romantic, Eco claims that they are more about the potentiality of what could happen. This unpredictability greatly contradicts the action of mythology, in which an archetypical hero goes through the motions of a story that most audience members already know. Also, the serial nature of comic books causes new stories to be released to the public on a regular basis. Each of these new stories features the aforementioned element of unpredictability and development that is so antithetical to the myth. In this way, it becomes difficult to view the comic book hero as taking part in a modern-day myth.

However, Eco suggests a solution to the problem of the unpredictable comic hero as archetypical mythic hero. The answer lies more with the hero's adventures than the hero. In a comic book story, "Virtue must be characterized in the accomplishment of only partial acts so that the plot can remain static."[8] The comic book hero's accomplishments must always be small-scale. The hero can perform good deeds, but none so great that they upset the commonly accepted flow and action of the hero's typical story. For instance, Superman can never use his awesome powers to abolish world governments and establish peace between nations. This would greatly upset the established tone and archetypes of Superman's mythic adventures. Superheroes' good deeds must never step outside of the status quo.

The observation that the comic book hero is the modern mythic hero opens up many narrative avenues for comics storytellers. Every tool of mythic storytelling is available to comic writers and artists. In particular, the structure of myths is something that is well used in comic book storytelling. Boehm studies the presence of mythic structures in DC Comics' *Kingdom Come*. He traces Superman's character arc from the start of the story to its end through the lens of Campbell's Hero Journey. Superman's actions fit neatly with the different elements that Campbell outlines. In this way, we can see how comic storytelling adopts and follows the plot structure of myths.

The use of mythic heroes and structures allows comic book storytellers to perform two different actions. The first involves the morals and ideals that the comic can impart. Stevens's study is the first to investigate this tendency. He searches for Thomas Pynchon's use of comic book tropes and references in his seminal 1973 novel *Gravity's Rainbow*. Stevens argues that these comic book elements are included in an attempt to take advantage of a process naturally inherent in graphic narratives. As he sees it, Pynchon is taking advantage of a natural mechanism inherent in the comic book's being that facilitates and supports the indoctrination of values. The source of this mechanism is what stands out in this review of the literature. Stevens

claims that sequential storytelling is able to indoctrinate the reader with values because of "the mythological method which comic books employ."[9] In referring to a mythological method, Stevens more than likely means the narrative structures and character archetypes. The text resonates on a deeper level with audience members since these mythological methods are familiar to their memories and the collective consciousness. Since these elements of myth allow the comic book to penetrate the reader's psyche, it allows for the safe and easy passage of values and ideals. In this way, the use of mythic tropes allows the comic book to indoctrinate the reader with values.

Just as they bolster the comic book's transmission of moral guidance to the audience, the mythic tools that comic books use also influence the nature and variety of the morals transmitted. We stereotypically view comic books as telling clichéd, simple stories. For instance, Protagonist A is the protector of a city. Antagonist B arrives to threaten the city's tranquility and well-being. At one point, B appears to have A backed against a wall. After a brief struggle, though, A defeats and imprisons B. In the end, the reader has been subjected to another iteration of the forces of Good triumphing over Evil. We observe no moral complexity in this model, especially after we are told the same story in countless comic books throughout the years. The characters do not grow or learn any lessons that they did not know before. Under this paradigm, the comic book offers nothing new in terms of contemplating morality and philosophy. This is the pejorative view of comic book storytelling that still causes them to be ignored as worthy of study.

However, the use of mythic elements allows comic book storytellers to infuse their graphic progeny with a wide variety of morals and values. Certain aspects of these mythic elements make it possible for the creators to break free of the above-mentioned plot paradigm. Gabilliet addresses this potential in an article on Stan Lee and John Buscema's 1968 series *Silver Surfer*. The series is infamous for being one of the first comic book superhero adventures to seriously deal with issues of philosophy. This is especially surprising as Lee's "Marvel Method" of storytelling led to some of the strictest adherents to the "Protagonist A vs. Antagonist B" paradigm. Gabilliet explains how Lee and Buscema's philosophical exploration became possible.

> Working on the margin of the superhero concept, [Lee and Buscema] posited the character within a narrative structure analogous to that found in literary myths. This allowed for the emergence of a meaning far less stereotyped than usual in a comic book, and enabled the authors to initiate a reflection on personal morality in the contemporary world.[10]

Here Gabilliet labels two aspects of Lee and Buscema's storytelling as allowing for their addressing more complex moral subject matter. The first is

their utilization of myth's narrative structure. As stated earlier in this chapter, many comic books borrow plot structures from different mythologies. While the "A vs. B" paradigm allows for no character growth, mythic narrative structures such as the Hero's Journey are predicated upon a character learning a new bit of knowledge or obtaining a new skill that will allow the seizing of victory. Although the character cannot change too much to remain an archetype, some kind of change must occur. This openness to the slight change or growth inherent in mythic structure opens up the field of morals and ideals available to comic storytellers.

The second element of Lee and Buscema's craft that opened up the complete range of ideals to comic book storytelling also facilitated their use of mythic structure. As stated at the beginning of the above excerpt, the pair worked in the margins of the superhero concept. The Silver Surfer's story arc in his eponymous series focused on the alien's wanderings throughout space as he attempted to find his way back to his home planet. This atypical plot was definitely outside of the normal superhero story embodied in the "A vs. B" paradigm. Working with a plot outside of those normally used in comic books gave Lee and Buscema two distinct advantages. First, unusual plots are bound to address unusual issues. With these issues come moral implications that reside outside of the mainstream. Second, a new, more interesting character arc allowed Lee and Buscema to embrace plot structures not normally employed in the telling of a comic book story. Of the structures available to them, mythic narrative constructions were one of the most enticing for the comic creators. Beyond that, Lee and Buscema's work in the narrative margins of the superhero concept opened the doors for mythic structures to be used similarly in other comic books. In particular, Gabilliet cites Len Wein and Berni Wrightson's *Swamp Thing* and Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams's *Green Lantern* as using mythic elements to explore complex philosophical issues in the superhero genre's margins.

This review of the literature reveals many aspects of the link between comic books and mythology. While comic books can be vehicles for retelling the mythology of ancient times, they can also become the mythology of the modern world. To remain the hero in these modern myths, the comic book hero must never accomplish significant good, always maintaining the status quo. Comic book stories also use the narrative structure of myths for a twofold purpose. First, the mythic structure helps comic books to indoctrinate with values. Second, it opens up the range of values addressed in the comic book's pages. The mythic elements of a comic book only increase their relevance to its society.

Since both *Star Wars* and comic books have an intimate relationship with mythology, one wonders how the two could work together in producing mythic content. Ideally, a story told in one medium could potentially gain stronger or different meaning by being adapted into a comic book. With

this in mind, I will examine the first six issues of Marvel Comics' *Star Wars* to see how they intensify or change the presence of mythology in the film's story.

Reynolds's characteristics of the mythic comic book superhero serve as an organizing principle for this study. He outlines seven characteristics of the comic book superhero that are inherently mythic in nature. The characteristics are lost parents, the man-god, justice, superheroes and politics, the normal and the super-powered, the secret identity, and science as magic. Since themes of justice and superheroes and politics dovetail in the *Star Wars* story, they are considered as one characteristic. The study follows these six characteristics as they appear in means available only to the comic book medium. These means include captions, additional dialogue, thought balloons, the use of static visuals, and the presence of scenes cut from the original film. In this way, it will become possible to chart the particular ways that Thomas and Chaykin used the comic book medium to enhance the story's mythic content.

LOST PARENTS

The motif of lost parents is present throughout the *Star Wars* series. From Anakin's loss of his mother to Princess Leia losing her family on Alderaan, the series is rife with examples of missing parental figures. However, this aspect of comic book superheroes is most obvious in the case of Luke Skywalker.

The comic book adaptation of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* was released long before *The Empire Strikes Back*. Therefore, the audience did not yet know that Darth Vader is Luke's father. At this point, Skywalker's father was thought to be dead at the hands of Darth Vader. Since an obvious father figure is not actually present in the story, surrogate parent figures largely replace Luke's absent father.

However, Luke loses all of these surrogate parent figures as well. Beru and Owen are the first surrogate parents whom Luke loses. In both the film and the comic book, Luke's aunt and uncle die off-screen. He discovers their remains after the fact. The comic book differs in that it never actually shows the farmers' charred corpses. Thomas uses dialogue to refer to them as "two smoldering piles."[11] The reader merely sees Luke's reaction to these formless lumps that are no longer his family members. The bodies vanish from the reader's sight. The two surrogate parents are so lost that they cease to exist in any form after their deaths.

It is interesting to note that, four panels after these two surrogate parents are literally removed from the picture, Luke decides to travel with his new surrogate parent, Ben Kenobi. The older Jedi mentors and teaches the

young orphan. Soon after this, though, Luke loses this father figure as well. Thomas emphasizes this loss by including additional dialogue not present in the film. After Vader kills Ben, Luke lashes out at the Sith Lord, yelling, "You killed him, you dirty—!"[12] The reader sees the intensity of Luke's rage. After all, he has lost another parental figure in a long history of losing parental figures.

Finally, Luke is reminded of his lost biological father on Yavin during the preparation for the Death Star raid. Another pilot overhears Luke's last name and reminisces about his father, Anakin. "I met your father once, when I was just a boy," the pilot remembers. "He was a great pilot! If you've got half your father's skill, you'll be better than all right!"[13] Here the reader's attention is drawn to an interesting issue. Luke has three potential legacies to fulfill. These legacies can lead to three separate life paths. Beru and Owen left Luke the legacy of becoming a simple farmer on a backwater world. Ben's legacy involves becoming a Jedi Knight. Following Anakin's legacy would lead to pursuing fame as a pilot.

In the end, though, Luke resolves the issue by choosing Ben's legacy. Instead of using the skills from either of his other two legacies, Luke uses the Force to destroy the Death Star. The dialogue in this scene is also different from the film. Ben's disembodied voice tells Luke to "Trust me!"[14] Here the emphasis is on trusting Ben and not the Force. The conflict of the lost parents is finally settled. While these people are still lost to Luke, the young Jedi has finally decided his true "parentage."

THE MAN-GOD

The motif of the man-god connects directly to Force use. Characters who are adept at using the Force receive the same treatment as gods. The presence of the man-god first becomes apparent when Ben saves Luke and the droids from the Tusken Raiders. Thomas describes the raiders as fleeing "as if before some horrible monster."[15] Describing Ben as a monster gives the reader a sense of his intimidating stature; one sees him as more than human. Chaykin's art enhances this effect. Ben is backlit by the golden glow of the sun, obscuring his features and making him appear to be a menacing, otherworldly presence. However, Thomas tells the reader that Ben is not a villain. He adds, "But to the little android Artoo Detoo, the approaching figure is hardly monstrous." The heroes may be in the presence of a god, but he is benevolent.

The next instance of a god-like Force user comes in the Mos Eisley cantina. After being accosted by a bar patron, Ben attacks him with his lightsaber. The art shows the other bar patrons regarding Ben with awe. Thomas's description furthers this portrayal. He notes that the bar-goers give Ben "a respectful amount of space at the bar."[16] Their reaction is like

worship. The awed distance that they keep is similar to the mixture of fear and reverence one might have for a god. Once again, Ben is backlit. His Force-related prowess in using his lightsaber has made him the subject of adoration among mortal men.

Ben loses the status of man-god after he perishes aboard the Death Star. However, the mantle of human deity passes to Luke. Once he masters the Force, Luke becomes a man-god. After using the Force to successfully destroy the Death Star, the young Skywalker returns to Yavin victorious. As Thomas describes, Luke "finds himself in the middle of a cheerful, gleaming throng."[17] Now that he has shown competency in using the Force, Luke is treated with adulation. A sea of adoring people surrounds him in an act reminiscent of worship. Chaykin's art shows Luke descending from his X-wing far above the crowd; he looks like a celestial being descending from a higher plane. Young Skywalker has achieved apotheosis, becoming the man-god by mastering the Force.

JUSTICE/SUPERHEROES AND POLITICS

The two characteristics of the mythic comic book hero that occur least in the comic adaptation of *Star Wars: A New Hope* are Justice and Superheroes and Politics. With that in mind, I will consider the two as one in this study, especially since the politics of the superhero in this case normally focus on the quest for justice. This perspective becomes most apparent in one of Thomas's captions. In the beginning of the third issue, he refers to the "freedom-loving Rebel Alliance" and the "far-flung, corrupt Galactic Empire."[18] Here the reader gets a sense of the politics of each side in this intergalactic civil war. The Rebel Alliance fights for freedom and the justice that comes with it. The heroes of the story are associated with justice. The Galactic Empire's corruption keeps it from ever supporting justice or honest politics. In these simple terms, justice and freedom are shown to be the political values of the story's heroes.

THE NORMAL AND THE SUPER-POWERED

This motif is expressed primarily through the story's central protagonist, Luke Skywalker, the main character of the narrative. The reader encounters the world of *Star Wars* through Luke's eyes. His life as a farmer on a backwater planet means that most of the events of the story are new, foreign experiences for him. In this way, Luke is the "normal" that gives the reader perspective on the super-powered. However, Thomas accompanies the idea of the super-powered with that of the extraordinary or unknown.

The scene between Luke and his friends on Tatooine establishes this relationship. The scene was scripted and filmed for the original movie but was cut from the final product. As the friends chat about their boring home, Luke notes, "This planet is a big hunk of nothing."[19] He portrays Tatooine as barren and bereft of fun and excitement. However, he is wrong. While Luke and his friends are having this conversation, a space battle is happening above them. Here the reader sees the beginning of the normal/super-powered contrast at play. Luke's world will always be "normal" compared to the vast wonders that await him.

In fact, Luke's life is normal compared to things that exist on his own planet. When R2-D2 disappears, Luke and C-3PO search for him. Young Skywalker's reaction to the vast terrain ahead of them is telling. "The wild things out here are said to be weird—and savage!" These creatures reside in an area so close to his farm that a small droid could roll there in a matter of hours. Luke is so normal that he sees his own backyard as exotic.

The next time Thomas uses his hero to highlight the difference between the normal and the super-powered comes in the Mos Eisley cantina. After Ben attempts to contract a pilot, he finds two in the form of Han Solo and Chewbacca. Luke's reaction to the latter is indicative of his normality. "Luke has heard about Wookiees," Thomas's captions explain. "But he never expected to see one, let alone meet one."[20] From additional entries in the *Star Wars* universe, the audience gets the idea that Wookiees are a common species, populating an entire planet, Kashyyyk. Despite their commonness, Luke seems startled and amazed by the Wookiee. Once again Thomas uses Luke to highlight the super-powered and abnormal.

Finally, Luke's normality comes in contrast with the "super-powered" beauty of Princess Leia. When he attempts to free her from her jail, Thomas provides the reader with narration and dialogue not present in the film. "But he stops—tongue-tied—when the smoke clears, . . ." Thomas notes.[21] Something in the cell has shocked Luke. As he confronts Leia, the young Skywalker adds, "Y-You're—even more beautiful—than I—." Here the reader sees a case of how Luke deals with extraordinary beauty. Just like any other instance of the fantastic in the film, Luke stammers and is rendered useless when dealing with the Princess's "super-powered" elegance and good looks.

As the story progresses, these instances become less and less frequent. This lessening is attributable to Luke's progress throughout the film. Once he gains mastery of the Force, he is no longer normal. He has become the super-powered.

THE SECRET IDENTITY

Many characters in *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* have secret identities. Leia is a respected dignitary in the Galactic Senate, but she leads a double

life as a member of the Rebel Alliance. Luke is a humble farm boy from Tatooine, but he is also a skilled pilot and adventurer who saves the universe. However, the comic book adaptation of the story does not offer any new insights into either of these dual identities.

It does offer new insights into two other secret identities, though. First, the reader sees explicitly the facets of Ben's double life. In one life, he is Ben Kenobi, hermit living in the Dune Sea. In the second, he is Obi-Wan Kenobi, Jedi Knight and former general during the Clone Wars. Thomas reminds the reader of this in the Mos Eisley cantina scene. After Ben dispatches Luke's tormentors, the younger man is "abruptly reminded that Old Ben Kenobi was once Obi-Wan Kenobi—a Jedi Knight."[22] Thomas once again uses Luke's own realizations to help his audience realize something. Through Luke's observation of the two sides of Ben's character, the reader comes to understand the nature of the older Jedi's secret identity.

The second secret identity emphasized in the comic book adaptation focuses on Han Solo. The captain of the *Millennium Falcon* constantly portrays himself as a brave man. He brags about his feats and accomplishments. In reality, he is a coward. The reader sees this during the hallway sequence on the Death Star. Solo pursues a group of stormtroopers down a hallway with the intent of killing them. In the film, this attempt is thwarted when he realizes that a battalion of troops is waiting for him at the end of the corridor. When faced with this magnified threat, Solo turns and runs away. The comic portrays this event in a different manner. Solo turns around because the stormtroopers are backed against a wall and have finally decided to fight. He runs once the stormtroopers have "got no choice but to turn and fight."[23] While numbers cowed him in the film, the comic book Han Solo runs at the prospect of actually having to fight. As this comment comes in a private moment, the reader sees that Solo will brag and boast when there are others around, but the space pirate will flee any actual conflict when no one is around to judge him.

SCIENCE AS MAGIC

As it lacks many of the conventions and preoccupations of science fiction, *Star Wars* avoids major consideration of scientific ethics and experimentation. The film's dealings with science largely focus on the heroes' technology, which often compares to magic.

Just like magic, the effects of technology are shown, but the mechanics are never explained. When a magician pulls a rabbit out of a hat, the audience is never told exactly how the rabbit was placed inside the top hat; the fact that a rabbit seems to appear out of nowhere is usually sufficient information. Technology is portrayed similarly in the *Star Wars* comic. An example of this comes in the scene where Luke discovers that R2-D2 has

fled the farm. In the film, Luke presses a button on a controller, and C-3PO responds by jumping out of hiding. In the comic book, Luke explains what is happening. "This control box will pop you out into the open!" he yells redundantly.[24] This effect is explained, but the reader is never told what the device is or how it works. Also, Chaykin's art shows an odd purple ray emitting from the controller. The ray has an otherworldly, supernatural feeling to it. Once again, its purpose or presence is not explained.

Technology is also portrayed in many cases as having the effects of a magical spell. Captured by the Death Star, the heroes cannot fly the *Millennium Falcon* out of the hangar bay because a tractor beam restrains it. As Thomas explains it, the tractor beam "holds Han Solo's ship in thrall."[25] The effect is described as if the ship has fallen prey to a sorcerer, who keeps the ship stationary through powerful magic. This trend is also apparent in the names of different technologies. In other media, Luke's droid companions are normally called "C-3PO" and "R2-D2." However, Thomas refers to them as "See Threepio" and "Artoo Detoo." By shedding the robots' alphanumeric nomenclature, they become less mechanical. Instead, their names now look like incantations from some arcane magic. In this way, many of the heroes' technologies resemble magical spells.

In adapting George Lucas's story to comic books, Roy Thomas and Howard Chaykin have turned the heroes of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* into comic book superheroes. This becomes apparent through the reoccurring motifs of lost parents, the man-god, justice/superheroes and politics, the normal and the super-powered, the secret identity, and science as magic. Since the comic medium is heavily connected to mythology, adaptation to comic books can allow a film's story to deepen its mythic connections. The transition from movie heroes to comic book superheroes becomes possible because of the bond with mythology held by both the *Star Wars* story and comic books. Whether they flicker on the screen or are splashed on pages of newsprint, George Lucas's mythic characters flawlessly transition between multiple media, adapting and deepening inherent themes of the broader *Star Wars* Universe.

NOTES

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10

The Jedi Network

Star Wars' Portrayal and Inspirations on the Small Screen

Eric Charles

Obi-Wan Kenobi defined the Force as an energy that "surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together."[1] In other words, the Force is everywhere. The only thing more omnipotent than this all-encompassing power is *Star Wars* itself. *Star Wars* not only revived a once beleaguered genre but also maintained a following, unmatched by any other piece of popular culture. Blockbusters and indie-films abound with *Star Wars* references. To this day, children keep their PB-J sandwiches in the safety of a Yoda lunchbox. Even the haughtiest of movie blogs hold *Star Wars* as a paragon of the science-fiction genre (though in reality, it is a space opera). One reason *Star Wars* resonates with so many people is the fact that it is a pastiche of popular culture, borrowing visuals and ideas from anywhere from Arthurian epics to Akira Kurosawa films. This blending of different tropes allowed people to connect with the epic series on a large scale. It comes as no surprise that over the last forty or so years, the people of Lucasfilm would try their luck at the small screen. But how does one successfully condense a movie on such a grand scale, one with so many different inspirations, into a minute medium? An exploration of *The Ewok Adventures* and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008) reveals how the creators solved this inherent problem. Both shows took specific elements that comprised *Star Wars*, fairy tales and old-time science-fiction serials, and utilized them as their templates.

Before delving into *The Clone Wars* and *Ewok Adventures*, it is necessary to be familiar with the history and context of *Star Wars* on television. After the success of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, in 1978 CBS aired a *Star Wars* animated holiday special. Though the program did well in ratings, the critics bashed it and even Lucas claimed he regretted making it.[2] *Star Wars* would not be back on TV for just shy of a decade. In 1984, George Lucas expanded

an idea of a one-hour Ewok special into two made-for-TV movies. Lucas had full authority on the content and production of the film, in order to guarantee[3] that *Ewok Adventure: Caravan of Courage* and *Ewok Adventure: Battle for Endor* played during ABC's Sunday Night Movie Night.[4] The movies were so popular in the United States that they spawned an animated spin-off known as *The Ewoks and Droids Adventure Hour*.[5] The program was decimated in ratings by a new cartoon from France called *The Smurfs*.[6] Also that year, *Star Wars* sound designer Ben Burtt made an hour-long cartoon special called *The Great Heap*. It showcased an adventure involving C-3PO, R2-D2, and the eponymous Great Heap, a giant, evil robot.[7] *Star Wars* would be absent from TV until 2003, with Genndy Tartakovsky's Emmy-winning micro-series called *Star Wars: Clone Wars*. In 2008, as part of a new agreement between Lucasfilm, Warner Brothers Pictures, and Turner Broadcasting system, a new CG *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* series was released.[8] *The Clone Wars* scored tremendous rating numbers for Cartoon Network[9] and even received an award from the Guinness World Records for highest-rated animated sci-fi show on television.[10] The massive success of *Clone Wars* has prompted Lucas to create many more ventures into the world of television; a Lego *Star Wars* special aired in late July[11] and Lucas is in talks for making the live-action *Star Wars* show he has been teasing for years.[12] Before examining *Ewok Adventures* and *The Clone Wars* (2008), it is import to specify which age group they target.

Though *Star Wars* is widely considered a film that people of all ages enjoy, *Ewok Adventure* and *The Clone Wars* (2008) were created for kids and young adults, respectively. When first creating *A New Hope*, George Lucas conceived *Star Wars* as a kids' movie.[13] In a 1976 *Los Angeles Times* interview, he stated that *Star Wars* was "aimed primarily at 14- and 15-year-olds," and the interview later said that it would be "a high-energy, Boy's own adventure."[14] A "high energy" adventure for young boys sounds an awful lot like an action serial in the vein of *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers*. In fact, Lucas originally wanted to create a remake of *Flash Gordon*, but the rights were too expensive.[15] Since *The Clone Wars* (2008) is basically a science fiction serial like the ones Lucas watched when he was a kid, one may assert that the show is made for adolescents. This point is further bolstered since *The Clone Wars* (2008) is on Cartoon Network, a channel primarily for kids (with the exception of its late-night programming called "Adult Swim"). Lucas also once said, when he was making *Star Wars*, that he "'decided [he] wanted to make a children's movie, to go the Disney route'" since "'a whole generation was growing up without fairytales.'"[16] The idea of a fairy tale, a story told largely to children, was a huge inspiration for *Star Wars*. It makes sense that Lucas would make *Ewok Adventure* a full-on fairy tale, and play it on ABC during a family-friendly time slot. In this composition, critics have declared that *Ewok Adventure* and *The Clone Wars* (2008) are primarily a fairy tale and an action serial, respectively. They have yet to prove these

claims. Close reading of these programs and secondary critical evaluations will reveal that the creators applied these genres, and their tropes, to reduce such an epic movie to the small screen.

The *Ewok Adventures: Caravan of Courage* and *Battle for Endor* are fairy tales in a science-fiction setting. The structure and semiotics of the programs allow them to be desirable to their youthful audience. An analysis of the *Ewok Adventures*, using structural morphology and fairy-tale conventions, illustrates that both movies are modern fairy tales. The *Ewok Adventure: Caravan of Courage* follows a stranded brother and sister, Mace and Cindel, who, with the help of Ewoks, rescue their parents from a monster called the Gorax. In the second Ewok adventure, *Battle for Endor*, Mace and his parents are massacred, and the evil Terak captures the Ewoks. Cindel, her Ewok friend Wicket, and a human hermit work together to rescue the Ewoks. Both films follow the basic structure of a fairy tale.

Vladimir Propp, a Russian folk-tale theorist, claimed that all folk or fairy tales use identical narrative units called functions that "constitute the fundamental components of a tale."[17] In his book, *Morphology of Folk Tales*, Propp outlined the thirty-one functions that all fairy tales employ. The Ewok movie adheres to these proposed functions. Propp believed every fairy tale started with an absentation, where the protagonist or a member of her family leaves the home environment.[18] In *Caravan of Courage*, absentation takes place when the Gorax captures Mace and Cindel's parents. This function occurs in *Battle for Endor* when Cindel's family is murdered and the Ewoks are captured. The next component is an interdiction that the hero eventually violates.[19] An interdiction is a command or a warning against doing something that in a fairy tale the hero disregards. A specific example of an interdiction in the *Battle for Endor* happens during Terak's attack, when the Ewok named Wicket tells Cindel to stay under a cart. She violates this command and is pursued by an evil witch named Charal. Propp also explains how after absentation and departure, when the hero goes off on an adventure, she will find a donor family. This donor family helps the hero and provides her with a magic agent.[20] In *Caravan of Courage*, the Ewoks act as the donor family for Mace and Cindel. One of the Ewoks called the Magic man provides enchanted tools that prove to be invaluable for triumph over the villain. Propp also stated that the heroes will overcome the more powerful villains (the Gorax and Terak) and save the damsels in distress (the parents and the Ewoks).[21] Despite the Gorax's size and strength, and Terak's huge army, they are both defeated in the end. The *Ewok Adventures*' adherence to the structure of a fairy tale insinuates that the programs are just science-fiction fairy tales. The movies also have specific motifs that are consistent with fairy tales.

The *Ewok Adventures* uses tropes that are consistent to fairy tales, but not science fiction. When the *Ewok* movies were originally conceived, the producers said they were a cross between "Hansel and Gretel and Tarzan

of the Apes."[22] Neither of these two inspirations fall into the science-fiction genre, which make sense because the *Ewok Adventures* use fantastical motifs instead of science-fiction ones. First off, the *Ewok Adventures* begin with a narrator talking about an enchanted forest. As a rule of thumb, nothing is enchanted in science fiction. Science explains all magic.[23] The *Ewok Adventures* have witches that can transform into crows and Ewoks that have magic powers. Theorist George MacDonald describes the "fantastic environment" of fairy tales as an "inverted world, with laws of other kids."[24] In a science-fiction movie, science or technology would explain the magical power. Since the *Ewok Adventures* does not explain the supernatural, it adheres closer to fairy tales.

Also, in science fiction, the setting tends to be "neutrally oriented" and sometimes even harmful.[25] Conversely, in the fairy tale world, the setting is positive and provides the hero with "helpers as needed."[26] In the *Ewok Adventures*, though there are some inimical creatures on Endor, for the most part, it is a fun and cheery place. The Ewoks are cute and cuddly and most of the creatures are either friendly apes or small, bright, flying creatures. Speaking of creatures, all of Endor's inhabitants come straight out of a fairy tale. There are bright, flying creatures that are doppelgangers for fairies, winged beasts that resemble dragons, a troll-like Gorax, and a witch that can transform into any animal. These characters have been in stories like *Peter Pan* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Even Terak and his army look like they are from a Brothers Grimm story. Terak and his henchman live in a castle surrounded by a moat, a popular villain setting for all fairy tales from the Middle Ages.

The conclusions of *Caravan of Courage* and *Battle of Endor* also follow fairy tale motifs, rather than science fiction. In a fairy tale, the "happy ending is the most common element of wish fulfillment."[27] The protagonist wishes to free her family and friends and live happily ever after. In science fiction, the hero wants to disrupt a hierarchy of "utopian society."[28] In both *Ewok* movies, the Ewoks' society is never questioned or probed; the story is solely about rescuing damsels in distress from evil villains. Though *Ewok Adventures* take place in a science-fiction setting, they are fairy tales. Even though *Star Wars* had elements of fairy tales, it adhered much more to science-fiction tropes. Having said that, what makes *Ewok Adventures* connect so highly with children is the fact that they are fairy tales.

Caravan of Courage and *Battle for Endor* are appealing to their audience of children due to their kid-friendly approach and psycho-analytics behind fairy tales. The *Ewok Adventures* are made for kids. In much of *Caravan of Courage* and some of *Battle for Endor*, a narrator is present who spells out the story for its viewers. Like a parent reading a fairy-tale book to her child, the narrator acts as a force who explains all elements of the story, to avoid confusion for the youthful audience. Since the *Ewok* movies are fairy tales,

they tap into the subconscious psyche of their viewers. These movies are appealing for the same reason that makes so many fairy tales timeless.

Since *Ewok Adventures* are fairy tales, they play off kids' subconscious trepidations and desires. Theorists believe that the fairy tale "speaks to the psyches of young people" who "identify with its young hero."[29] These stories tap into children's subconscious, giving them "comfort and courage to deal with the problems [they] all face."[30] Using fairy-tale theorist Bruno Bettelheim's book, *The Uses of Enchantment*, it is evident that the *Ewok* movies used the same psychoanalytic tropes to connect to its viewers. Bettelheim believed that fairy tales are "patriarchal metanarratives" that appropriated childhood fears and desires and acted as therapy for their qualms.[31] Fairy tales are just stories about kids taking care of themselves and finding their identities. In both *Ewok Adventures*, the children are abandoned by their family and have to take care of themselves. This overarching theme allows the viewers to cope with fears of independence and abandonment. The Ewoks also act as a way for children to cope with their own identities.

In fairy tales, it is common for animals to communicate and help the child heroes. Bettelheim believes that since children are trying to comprehend the complicated world, they expect "answers from those objects which arouse his curiosity." Because the child is egocentric, she will believe the animals will help her out and talk about things relevant to her; this is why so many kids talk to dolls and teddy bears.[32] Also, since animals wander freely in the world, it makes sense to children that they would act as guides and advisors.[33] In the *Ewok Adventures*, the Ewoks, who look like humanized woodland creatures, help and guide Mace and Cindel. The Ewoks comfort the children viewers because of their animal-like appearance. The viewers can understand why Mace and Cindel would join the Ewoks. A connection is made for the audience and their deep-seated anxieties are quelled by the presence of these Ewoks. The Ewoks also look similar to another important object of a child's world.

The Ewoks resemble teddy bears, another comforting tool in a child's life. In early adolescence, it is not uncommon to see a child stumbling around holding the hand of a teddy bear. As stated before, the child probably finds comfort in the fact that it's a bear. Beyond that, a kid can also find solace in it since it is a toy. According to Bettelheim, when children play, they use dolls and toys "to embody various aspects of the child's personality which are too complex . . . for him to handle."[34] By projecting her personality onto a toy, a child's ego can gain "mastery over these elements," which she has trouble doing otherwise.[35] Toys, like teddy bears, allow children to master their identities and complex personalities. The Ewoks serve as extensions of children's personalities and fears. Child viewers feel comforted when seeing the Ewoks aid Mace and Cindel, because it is a manifestation of their fantasies—animals and toys that help the children deal with their problems,

such as abandonment and identity. A specific example of Ewoks helping the hero cope with identity is illustrated in *Caravan of Courage*.

In *Caravan of Courage*, Mace looks into a lake and sees his own reflection. When he touches his image, he is magically transported into the lake where he cannot get out. He is rescued from a watery death by an Ewok and its magic stick. This scene is extremely poignant when we apply Bettelheim's psychoanalysis to it. Bettelheim writes that when a child begins to examine her identity, she looks at her mirror reflection.[36] The child wonders whether that is herself in the mirror or another child. She begins to move around to test whether it is really her image. Already, the child is battling and assessing her own identity.[37] In the aforementioned scene, Mace has a run-in with his own identity, his mirror image, and it ends up literally trapping him. Mace only comes to confront his identity when the Ewoks save him with their magical agent. Like the viewers who are watching, Mace needed his "teddy-bear" Ewok to help him cope with his identity. This scene subconsciously comforts the viewers, making the film more appealing. Like *Ewok Adventures*, another *Star Wars* television show used an element of the movie as its model.

Star Wars: The Clone Wars (2008 [hereafter *Clone Wars*]) is a modern science-fiction serial, in the spirit of *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers*. The program is very successful because it uses motifs that made both these serials and the original *Star Wars* trilogy so beloved and timeless. When asked about *Star Wars*, Lucas responded, "*Star Wars* is basically a serial for children—that's what it's always been."[38] Lucas has said many times that he wanted to make a nostalgic film that took America back to a simpler time, like the Saturday afternoon serials of the 1950s.[39] In fact, Lucas had wanted to make an updated *Flash Gordon*, but the rights were too expensive.[40] He instead made *Star Wars*, but the 1950s sci-fi serials still remained a huge inspiration for it. Lucas borrowed costume and hair ideas from the original *Flash Gordon*.[41] When describing his conception of a specific scene to producer Alan Ladd Jr., he cited a specific scene from *Flash Gordon* as an example.[42] The spirit of these serials really did run through the *Star Wars* saga. It only makes sense that Lucas would structure *Clone Wars* as a science-fiction serial, since that is what it really is.

When first announcing *Clone Wars*, Lucas said the show would combine "the expansive scope of *Star Wars* saga with state-of-the-art computer-generated animation."[43] This explanation sounds eerily similar to the way George Turner described *Flash Gordon*: "an interplanetary yarn necessitating fantastic sets, bizarre characters, a great variety of costumes, and a mind boggling number of special effect shots."[44] Lucas also promised that each episode would act as a "mini-movie."[45] Sci-fi serials of the 1950s were like mini-movies as well, where a character like Flash would be sent to a far-off land to defeat a villain or rescue people in need. One cannot truly see the

certitude of this claim without comparing *Clone Wars* and *Flash Gordon*, side by side.

A reading of *Flash Gordon: Planet of Peril* and episodes of *Clone Wars* reveal how similar in nature these shows are. Both *Clone Wars* and *Flash Gordon* open the same way; the title of the show is in big letters across the screen while grand music is playing in the background. The characters of both shows are also very similar. Both Flash and Anakin are blond, blue-eyed leaders. They both have a female companion: Flash has Dale Arden and Anakin is accompanied by his Padawan Ahsoka. Flash and Anakin also have older (somewhat) mentors, Dr. Zarkov and Yoda, respectively. In both the *Clone Wars* and *Flash Gordon*, the heroes and villains are clearly drawn. Chancellor Palpatine and Ming the Merciless are both decrepit, ruthless men in high positions of power. *Flash Gordon* and *Clone Wars* also have similar compositions and tropes.

Clone Wars and *Flash Gordon* share similar episode structure as well as themes. Both shows employ simple plots in each episode. Unlike the *Star Wars* prequels that involved convoluted political narratives, each episode of *Clone Wars* focuses on a simple story. For example, in "Rising Malevolence," the entire episode involves Anakin and Ahsoka rescuing stranded clone troopers. Though the episode is simple, it is also action packed, including General Grievous's death ray and multiple chase scenes. This structure is extremely similar to that of *Flash Gordon: Planet of Peril*; the whole story involves Earth in danger and Flash, Dale, and Zarkov going to the planet Mongo to stop Ming the Merciless. Like *Clone Wars*, there is action dispersed throughout this simple narrative. Flash and Dale have to fly an airplane out of a meteor shower. Flash and friends face peril like the hostile cavemen and giant iguanas. These obstacles are very similar to what Yoda has to go through in an episode called "Ambush." On a foreign planet, Yoda must fight droids and villains to survive and reach an important negotiation.

Both programs also have similar motifs as well. *Flash Gordon* and *Clone Wars* both celebrate the conflict between technology and spirit, while also providing the viewer with moral messages. In *Flash Gordon*, there is a conflict between those with technology and those, like Flash, who must use means of intelligence and faith to triumph.[46] Even though Ming has technology to move planets and create "natural" disasters, Flash always succeeds. We see this idea also illustrated in *The Clone Wars* (2008). In "Ambush," Yoda and a handful of clone troopers must survive against a multitude of droid warriors sent by Count Dooku. Like Ming, Dooku has all technological means at his disposal. Despite this advantage, Yoda uses intelligence, strategy, and tenacity to squash the overwhelming droid army. Besides this theme, *Flash Gordon* and *Clone Wars* also provide a strong moral message. Serials like *Flash Gordon* lay out moral messages like "respect the law" and "crime does not pay."[47] *Flash Gordon: Planet of Peril* teaches the importance of courage

through Flash's actions. *Clone Wars* (2008) is a bit more explicit; every episode begins with an aphorism displayed later on. The episode "Ambush" starts with the quotation, "Great leaders inspire greatness in others."[48] Yoda's fearlessness and courage in the episode exemplify this maxim. The similarities, from structure to recurring themes, between *Clone Wars* and *Flash Gordon* illustrate that they are both serials. The simple, action-packed plots and heroic characters that typify the serial genre make *Clone Wars* such an appealing show.

Though *Clone Wars* (2008) was made after the critically and fan beleaguered *Star Wars* prequels, it managed to be a huge commercial and critical success. By using the sci-fi serial format, the show, for lack of a better word, worked. The serial nature of *Clone Wars* allowed it to be simple; and as many would attest, most times, less is more. As previously stated, the villains are evil and the heroes are good. Despite knowledge of what happens to Anakin in the future, he is still a genuinely good hero. The program clearly shows the audience who are the villains in each episode. The plot also always involves a simple mission. For example, in "Shadow of Malevolence," Anakin needs to protect a clone hospital and destroy General Grievous's weapon. There are no interplanetary negotiations and trade federation blockades, just a simple mission the hero needs to achieve. The creators of *Clone Wars* were able to react and correct the mistakes of the *Star Wars* prequels. I will address this point in more detail later. The use of this simplicity, epitomized in sci-fi serials, was the creator's greatest asset. This science fiction serial template has another positive effect on the viewer's relationship with the program.

The sci-fi, and even comic book, serial format of *Clone Wars* allows the audience to connect with the material. Theorists assert that serials meet children's need for "overcoming, in imagination, some of the limitations of their age," and the ability to attain "a sense of adventure."[49] The action and adventure provides the reader with a "mental catharsis."[50] Aristotle described it as drama, and it causes the viewers to let go of their fear and aggression. The action and adventure in sci-fi serials and *Clone Wars* allow its adolescent viewers to escape from reality and find an outlet for prohibited feelings. By watching *Clone Wars*, viewers feel better, liberated. The audience also responds to this "drama" simply due to their curiosity. A serial provides a tension in the viewers, since they do not know how the hero will get out of a compromising situation.[51] An example of this is shown in "Shadow of Malevolence," when Anakin has to devise a way to stop Grievous's weapon. He eventually shoots it, causing the ray to overload. This quandary engages the viewers; the excitement allows them to let go of fear and hostility.

Another reason *Clone Wars* is so successful has to do with the timing of its production. As stated earlier, since *Clone Wars* was made after the prequel

trilogy, but takes place between *Episode II—Attack of the Clones* and *Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*, the creators recognized mistakes and improved upon them. *Clone Wars* acts as a spell-check for the prequels. Although it involves the same characters, settings, and situation, the show opens the way for improvements, especially in terms of character development. As previously stated, with the serial format, each episode can act as a simple mini-movie. The creators improved the structure from the plotting and tiresome political environment of the prequels to the minimal "mission of the week." The show also improves on characters. *Clone Wars* makes Anakin into a more likable and powerful Jedi. The viewer really sees him grow, and therefore has a deeper connection with him. It is especially interesting when Anakin faces a moral dilemma. One particular example occurs in "Shadow of Malevolence" when Anakin cannot decide whether to protect the clone hospital or go after Grievous. *Clone Wars* also prompts the viewer to see Yoda as a powerful leader. Fans and casual *Star Wars* viewers have always known Yoda to be wise. The only time we ever saw him as a powerful Jedi Knight was for a short time in *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*. *Clone Wars* corrects this mistake by making episodes that highlight Yoda's skill and leadership, as in "Ambush," enriching and deepening Yoda's character even further. *Clone Wars* also added a necessary character especially attractive to the show's adolescent demographic. Ahsoka, Anakin's Padawan, acts as a surrogate for the child viewer. The young student can ask Anakin the questions that viewers would want to ask; she is their connection to the *Star Wars* universe. Also, giving Anakin a student shows him as a wise and seasoned Jedi. This detail was missing from the prequels and helps define his character tremendously.

Both *Ewok Adventures* and *Clone Wars* are quality additions to the *Star Wars* canon. After writing this essay, a realization hit this particular fan over his head; maybe the reason these programs were successful was that they went back to elements that made the original trilogy great. *Star Wars* used to be an amalgamation of all things cool and adventurous. Blending science fiction with old-time serials and fairy tales really brings *Star Wars* back to its original glory, and this is where the problems lie in the prequels. When making the original *Star Wars*, and even *The Ewok Adventures* and *Clone Wars*, a multitude of pop-culture elements inspired Lucas; he took things he loved and added his skill and visual eye to it. This is pure speculation, but it seems as if Lucas looked to himself as the biggest inspiration for the prequels. There is no arguing that the prequels found some inspirations in other materials, but it felt mostly like an imitation of the original trilogy. An anecdote from actor and comedian Simon Pegg further supports this idea. One of the closing chapters of Pegg's autobiography, *Nerd Do Well*, describes Pegg, a die-hard *Star Wars* fan, meeting Lucas for the first time. Pegg starts the chapter describing his dismay with the prequels and

ends with him nervously meeting Lucas at the *Revenge of the Sith* premiere. At the premiere's after-party, Lucas asks Pegg if he [Lucas] can give him a piece of advice about filmmaking. He looks at Pegg and says, "Just don't suddenly find yourself making the same film you made thirty years ago."[52] Lucas obviously is not content with the new trilogy. Pegg speculates that his biggest failure was the inability "to trust anyone else."[53] Lucas is no doubt a visionary and a movie-making genius; but without collaboration, from both other people and other pieces of art, his films stumble. I hope that the achievement of *Star Wars* on television, especially the *Clone Wars*, illustrates the importance of knowing one's creative limitations. These programs showed us that originality comes from taking something one is passionate about and putting a unique spin on it. Lucas briefly forgot one of the aphorisms that he forged: the idea that one must let go of one's ego. Though the prequels left fans downcast, *Clone Wars* and other *Star Wars* programs have shown that the Force is still strong in Lucas and the universe he created.

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11

Gaming in a Galaxy Far, Far Away

The History of the Expanded Worlds, Canon Conflicts, and Simplified Morality of *Star Wars* Video Games

Seth Sommerfeld

On May 25, 1977, *Star Wars* premiered in theaters and changed the face of cinema with its pure, unadulterated brand of blockbuster escapist fare. George Lucas created a space fantasy of distant worlds, imaginative creatures, and intergalactic conflict that immediately struck a chord with millions of viewers.

Less than five months later, on October 14, another release marked a turning point in a medium even more modern than movies—video gaming. On that day, the Atari 2600 hit store shelves in the United States. While not the first home video gaming console, the 2600 was the first to take hold, capture the American imagination, and move video gaming from an arcade fad to an entertainment institution.

Both *Star Wars* and the 2600 marked the height of technological achievement upon their releases. It was only a matter of time before the universes of *Star Wars* and video gaming collided, especially considering the way Lucas was aggressively expanding and branding his empire. With a built-in audience of millions and exciting, action-packed storylines, the galaxies of *Star Wars* seemed perfect fodder for game developers. With over 100 licensed games having hit the marketplace, it seems that intuition was correct.[1]

At their peak, *Star Wars* video games revolutionized the gaming industry while garnering numerous "Game of the Year" awards[2] and achieving huge commercial success.[3] But at other times, the gaming experience in a galaxy far, far away has often been bumpier than riding through an asteroid field (where the odds of successfully navigating are approximately 3,720 to 1).

In addition to dealing with typical video game programming pitfalls (from clunky controls to poor character design), *Star Wars* games have also

struggled with problems that are unique to the universe Lucas created. Two issues stand out in particular: *Star Wars* video games conflicting or not fitting in well with the canon established in the movies, and the problem with oversimplifying the complexity and morality of the light and dark sides of the Force.

★ ★ ★

Despite the seemingly perfect potential for crossover between the two technological marvels, the paths of the *Star Wars* universe and video gaming did not intersect until 1982. Oddly enough, the first *Star Wars* video game released didn't even focus on the first film; instead it was based around the second film, *The Empire Strikes Back*, which was released two years earlier, in 1980.

Produced by board game giant Parker Brothers for the Atari 2600, *The Empire Strikes Back* depicted the Battle of Hoth. The game's action focused on the fight between the Rebel Alliance's snow speeders and the massive Imperial AT-AT walkers on Hoth's icy wasteland. The player took control of the snow speeder and had to shoot the AT-AT forty-eight times with the blaster in order to take it down (and in doing so provided the first disconnect in *Star Wars* video gaming canon, as the snow speeders' blasters are completely ineffective against the AT-ATs in the film).[4] After the first defeat, a new AT-AT would appear and the cycle would repeat infinitely with difficulty progressively ramping up. In comparison to modern titles, the repetitive gameplay and pixilated graphics of *The Empire Strikes Back* now seem positively archaic, but at the time the game was both a critical and commercial success. It was soon followed up by *Return of the Jedi Death Star Battle*, which is considered to be a far inferior title.

These early games were limited in their use of the *Star Wars* films' narrative. Because the Atari game cartridges contained so little memory, it was impossible for designers to tell the full story of any of the installments in the trilogy. Instead they had to focus on a single battle, such as Hoth, and try to find a way to make the repetitive combat interesting, challenging, and rewarding enough to warrant replays.

However, the momentum of *Star Wars* gaming was soon derailed, unintentionally but ironically, by Lucas's noted professional partner and friend—Steven Spielberg. In the wake of the 1982 box office success of *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, Warner Communications spent a staggering $21 million purchasing the rights to make a video game based on the film. The real problem came when they decided to make the game in only six weeks in order to get it on shelves before Christmas 1982. The horribly rushed result is a product that many still consider the worst video game ever made. If making an unplayable mess weren't bad enough, Atari epically overestimated the market for the title, shipping a whopping five million cartridges.

Only 1.5 million cartridges sold, and the severe financial hit that Atari absorbed is often cited as one of the major factors that led to the video game crash of 1983.[5] Atari literally had to bury many of the unused cartridges in a New Mexico landfill.[6] The long-term viability of home video gaming looked doubtful. With the home video game console market appearing to be on its deathbed, the next *Star Wars* games were developed instead for the hot gaming industry at the time—video arcades.

In July 1983, two months after the release of the third film in the original trilogy, *Return of the Jedi*, the first game based on the original film (now distinguished as *A New Hope*) arrived in arcades. Simply known as *Star Wars*, the title was a first-person rail shooter/space simulator that put players in the cockpit of Luke's x-wing starfighter during the assault run on the first Death Star. It was leaps and bounds beyond the previous *Star Wars* games in terms of immersion into the films (even going so far as being the only game to incorporate actual voice samples of Mark Hamill as Luke, Harrison Ford as Han Solo, Alec Guinness as Obi-Wan, and James Earl Jones as Darth Vader). Employing 3-D color vector (wireframe) graphics and a spinning control wheel, the game actually made players feel like they were a part of the approach, surface battle, and trench run of the Death Star. The game quickly became a hit.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that the game was a success considering the psychological aspects of actually placing the player in Skywalker's cockpit. Part of the massive appeal of *Star Wars* was the archetypal nature of Luke's character—the big-dreamer who thought he could be a galactic hero if given the chance. This big-dreaming idealism is embedded into the American way of thinking, meaning literally millions of people could relate to Luke on this front. Watching the films, people would subconsciously place themselves in Luke's position; he acts as the stand-in for the audience, and his personal dream achievement became their own wish fulfillment. Naturally, the closer an interactive gaming experience could get to capturing actually being Luke Skywalker, the better chance it would have to feel like an authentic *Star Wars* adventure. That's just what the first arcade cabinet delivered, thus instantly winning an audience.

Also in the same period (1982), Lucas started up his own video game development studio, LucasArts (formerly Lucasfilm Games). Ever the savvy businessman, Lucas saw another opportunity to develop unique imaginative properties and cash in. Surprisingly, the studio didn't initially focus on producing *Star Wars* titles. LucasArts actually built their reputation on home computer platforms through the genre of adventure games, heavy text-based point and click journeys with complex puzzles and a heavy dose of humor. Titles of this sort include *Maniac Mansion*, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, and *Sam & Max*. To this day adventure games and LucasArts are synonymous. In 1990, LucasArts finally broke the *Star Wars* gaming barrier

with *X-Wing*, and has since been involved with nearly all of the subsequent *Star Wars* gaming releases.

★ ★ ★

The home video market did manage to rebound from near disaster in 1983 and 1984, but *Star Wars* would not make a full-fledged return to consoles until 1991 (the extremely bizarre, barely connected to the storyline, and Japanese-only release of 1987's *Star Wars* for the Famicom notwithstanding). By that time, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and its 8-bit gaming was king of the industry.

The NES version of *Star Wars* (also ported to the Sega Master System and the handheld Nintendo Game Boy and Sega Game Gear systems) was the first game to tackle the entire story of one of the trilogy's films in its entirety. What was previously impossible on consoles like the Atari 2600 due to memory constraints of the cartridges was now possible due to technological advances allowing for multiple varied levels of deep gameplay. The game detailed all the action from Luke's humble beginnings on Tatooine to the climactic destruction of the Death Star.

The game also showcased the first extensive example of deviations from the canon of the *Star Wars* story. Even as action-packed as the *Star Wars* films are, they still do not contain enough action scenes to constitute a full game. In order to fill the lack of action, many scenes that previously had no action suddenly featured Luke in adventure mode. For example, do you remember the classic scene in *A New Hope* when Luke has to enter the Jawas' Sandcrawler to rescue R2-D2? Of course not, because it didn't happen on celluloid, but that was the first major task for Luke to accomplish in the NES adaptation. Even stranger was the lack of Darth Vader in the title. His character doesn't appear at all in the game, yet the plot still holds together. The game essentially relied on the hope that gamers would be familiar with the film and fill in Vader without being told he was there. Because of the immense popularity of the *Star Wars* franchise, this actually worked.

Star Wars for the NES actually caught the system in its twilight years, as Nintendo had already released the new 16-bit Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) by the time the game arrived in stores. But while the NES game had plot inconsistencies with the film, *Super Star Wars* took it to a whole new level. This was largely due to the game's designers going along with video game norms and placing boss battles at the end of stages. Suddenly Luke was fighting a Sarlacc pit monster on the Tatooine deserts as well as a giant mutant womp rat (clearly seeking revenge for all his bulls-eyed kin) in a cave. The subsequent chapters in the *Super* series (following the two movie sequels) continued this tradition of forcing odd boss fights that conflicted with the movie. The most notable of these occurred in 1994's *Super Return of the Jedi* when Luke must use his lightsaber to fight the

Force lightning, dispensing Emperor Palpatine as a final boss. Fighting the Emperor undermines the entire meaning of the film trilogy's end. Instead of focusing on the movie's nonviolent and redemption-based ending, the game essentially presents striking down the Emperor as the only option.

A much more amusing and less morally upsetting example of canon conflict in games based on the movies came in 1999 with the release of *Star Wars Episode One Racer* on the Nintendo 64. A racing game based on the pod-racing scene in *The Phantom Menace*, the title expanded the racing subculture to a full circuit of racing cups over multiple planets and racetracks. The one flaw in this formula was that young Anakin Skywalker was one of the racers in the series. When exactly in the narrative timeline of the canon did little Annie have time to jet across systems to compete in this intergalactic series of races?

Other games don't even seem to be trying with regard to canon; the PC space fighter simulation *Rebel Assault* is perhaps the most notorious. It places the player as a bland nameless pilot referred to only as "Rookie One." Somehow, over the course of the game, "Rookie One" participates in the Battle of Hoth versus the AT-ATs, *before* he makes the final run on the first Death Star. That's right. It's not Luke Skywalker who saved the Rebel Alliance in the world of *Rebel Assault*, it's "Rookie One." This is a case of the previously mentioned putting of the gamer into the hero's shoes going one step too far. The miscalculation by developers lay in the fact that *Star Wars* fans can actually see more of themselves in Luke than a bland placeholder like "Rookie One."

A major development in the *Star Wars* universe, including video games and the overall canon, came in 1991 when Lucas allowed the galaxies he created to be opened up to new material, mostly in the form of novelizations. Among these novelizations is the *X-Wing* book series, which details the exploits of Rogue Squadron, a group of the best Rebel pilots formed and led by Wedge Antilles and Luke Skywalker. Their starfighter battles helped weave more tales of daring adventure into the original trilogy's timeline without intruding on any major events. The series moved to gaming via the Nintendo 64 in 1999 and had two sequels on the Nintendo GameCube.

The biggest Expanded Universe event and an important canon moment came in 1996 with *Shadows of the Empire*. The story bridged the gap between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, and Lucas's entertainment machine planned its release as a true multimedia project set across three distinct mediums in the same year—as a novel, a comic, and a video game.[7] Released on the Nintendo 64 in December, *Shadows of the Empire* was the first expanded universe story to receive a full video game adaptation. The game action focused on Dash Rendar, an old friend of Han Solo who was essentially a Han clone (even piloting a ship, the *Outliner*, that looked similar to the *Millennium Falcon*). Rendar's journey included piloting a snow

speeder in the Battle of Hoth, fighting Boba Fett on Gall, and stealing the plans for the second Death Star for the Rebellion. Overall, the story did a good job of tying together some loose ends between *Empire* and *Jedi* without intruding into the movie's established tale.

A much greater suspension of disbelief is required when dealing with the gaming series that launched in 2008—*Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* (Xbox 360, PlayStation 2 & 3, PC, and Nintendo Wii). In the game, the player assumes the role of Starkiller, Darth Vader's secret apprentice in the period closely leading up to *A New Hope*. As the story unfolds, Starkiller becomes wary of his master. Eventually he must confront either Emperor Palatine or Vader (I will discuss this choice when talking about the light and dark sides of the Force in games later). Confronting the Emperor is the "correct" choice for the canon, resulting in Starkiller sacrificing himself and becoming a martyr who inspires the formation of the Rebel Alliance. Suddenly Starkiller becomes a vitally important character in the Rebellion history, which just doesn't sit right after playing through the game.

Part of the difficulty in accepting the role of Starkiller is how late, in terms of actual time in our own real world, we learned of his exploits. If Starkiller were the inspiration for the Rebel Alliance, why does *no one* in any other *Star Wars* story talk about him? Wouldn't a super-powerful Jedi who almost defeated Darth Vader twice (though *technically* it's a Starkiller clone the second time in the 2010 sequel game *The Force Unleashed II*) have been brought up at least in passing by someone (perhaps by Princess Leia or rebel leader Mon Mothma, both of whom were saved by Starkiller) during Luke Skywalker's Jedi journey?

As if the basic story of *The Force Unleashed* weren't enough of a stretch, the *Ultimate Sith Edition* downloadable content expansion for the game continued on the alternate reality of the non-canon ending where Starkiller defeated Darth Vader and became the Emperor's new apprentice—Lord Starkiller. In this alternate universe, Lord Starkiller tracks down R2-D2 and C-3PO when they have the Death Star plans on Tatooine. He then kills Obi-Wan Kenobi as Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Chewbacca, and the droids board the *Millennium Falcon* on Docking Bay 94 in Mos Eisley. Lord Starkiller later confronts Luke Skywalker at Echo Base on Hoth, defeats him, and turns him to the Dark Side of the Force. No other *Star Wars* video game even comes close to altering the canon in such an extreme manner.

Oddly, the games that have stuck closest to the *Star Wars* canon's story have been from the *LEGO Star Wars* series. The graphics of the games depict the entire *Star Wars* universe in terms of LEGO building blocks, everything from the ships to the characters. While the games are known for their simplicity (making them playable for all ages) and sense of humor in telling the narrative, they don't veer from what is depicted in the movies. Levels focus on major plot points and don't add any extraneous side stories or

canon conflicts. The *LEGO Star Wars* series may just be *Star Wars* gaming at its purest, despite its blocky look.

Perhaps the smartest way to avoid canon conflicts in *Star Wars* games is in 2003's *Knights of the Old Republic* (very loosely based on the graphic novel series *Tales of the Jedi*) for Xbox and PC. It was the first role-playing game in *Star Wars* gaming history, and is widely considered to be the most critically acclaimed and adored *Star Wars* video game. Wisely, developers got around any issue of adhering to the movies' canon by setting its plot 3,956 years before the Battle of Yavin (BBY). By placing the game in the distant past of the universe, the developers were able to employ everything beloved about the *Star Wars* universe, from droids and blasters to the Force and lightsabers, and to make big galaxy-defining plots without upsetting any threads of the movie series.

★ ★ ★

The biggest flaw of early *Star Wars* titles is the way they focused so much on the laser-heavy aspects of Lucas's universe. While blaster battles and space dogfights are all well and good, they do not capture the aspects that set the potential for *Star Wars* games apart. After all, if gamers just wanted to shoot guns and fly around with a warfare backdrop there are scores of games based on real wars (like the *Call of Duty* franchise). Heck, even if gamers wanted space shooting they could turn to the arcade classic *Asteroids* (a game that makes C-3PO's odds of successfully navigating an asteroid field seem entirely too generous).

The two unique aspects that *Star Wars* video games could tap into were aspects of the Jedi: the wielding of a lightsaber and the ability to use the Force and its powers. The powers of a Jedi were first explored (very poorly) in 1983's *Star Wars: Jedi Arena* for the Atari 2600, where players could move an ugly line representing a lightsaber left to right to defend themselves from a training remote (like the one Luke famously deflected shots from while having his vision blocked by a helmet in *A New Hope*). It wasn't until *Super Empire Strikes Back* that players were able to use what were called Force powers, but these strayed from actual established powers in the movies and instead focused on things commonly found in many video games, like regaining some heath, becoming invisible to enemies, slowing down time, and even floating/flying. But as can be expected, the use and complexity of lightsaber fighting and Force powers progressed as games became more advanced.

In 1995 developers built on a variation of the engine for the first-person shooter classic *Doom* (referred to as the Sith engine), to create *Dark Forces* for Mac and DOS. The story detailed the exploits of Kyle Katarn, a former Imperial turned Rebel mercenary who was actually the man who stole the original Death Star plans. While his first adventure was pure first-person

shooter action, the sequel marked a big step forward in portraying Jedi Knights in video games.

Dark Forces II: Jedi Knights premiered in 1997 and chronicled Katarn's journey as he discovered how to harness the powers of the Force and become a Jedi. All of a sudden, the first-person shooter became a first-person lightsaber wielding and Force power dispensing adventure. The Force powers that a player could build were also closer to standard fare laid out in the films, including the Jedi mind trick, Force lightning, and Force choke.

The title was also the first to explore effectively the dichotomy of the light and dark sides of the Force. *Star Wars* games had not even allowed players to play as the Empire until the release of 1994's *X-Wing* sequel, *Tie Fighter*. Now players could make decisions that determined which side of the Force they championed. If players attempted to avoid conflict and behave peacefully when possible, they received credit for being on the Light Side of the Force, while those who acted violently and maliciously at every turn were judged to be playing as the Dark Side. Depending on how they played, players would receive either a Light Side or Dark Side ending, each differing greatly from the other. These alternative universe endings are the types of things often reserved for fan fiction in the past, but in games like *Dark Forces II*, they can be visually played out in elaborate cut scenes.

While the moral structure of being accountable for your actions was a major breakthrough in *Star Wars* video game storytelling, *Dark Forces II* also set the precedent for a seriously flawed aspect of that system, namely that the Light Side choice is always the "correct" choice. While following the Dark Side didn't limit the actual gameplay experience, the writers of *Star Wars* games always set up the Light Side ending to comply with the canon while the Dark Side ending, while it may be interesting, never gels with the larger story narrative. Even in the movies, evil winning is a possibility, but writers for games have essentially stripped their titles of that option, thereby lessening the potential moral complexity of the games they produce.

Despite this flaw, no other character introduced mainly through video games appeared as often or attracted the same level of fanfare as Katarn. Two more follow-ups to *Dark Forces II*, *Jedi Outcast* and *Jedi Academy*, filled out more of Katarn's story. But even without these, the character changed the way in which gamers viewed the way they could play as Jedi.

Knights of the Old Republic expanded and nearly perfected the building of a Jedi in a video game. Players could create their own characters from scratch, determining everything from gender to species to fighting style. The story follows the created characters as they realize they have Jedi abilities while seeking to take down the evil Darth Malak. Employing the role-playing game format, players were able to slowly raise their characters' levels and build their Jedi skills. Corresponding with the Jedi tradition, players were even able to build their own lightsabers. As with *Dark Forces II*, the

game had light and dark side endings; what the player ended up seeing was based on a multitude of decisions up to that point, such as their quest for passivity or thirst for violence.

Knights of the Old Republic also used dialogue options to interact with the computer characters and determine on which side of the Force the player stood, with many different speech options available. The one flaw in this system is that most of the time it essentially boiled down three options: Be bland and neutral in your speech, be super nice and compassionate and receive Light Side points, or be totally cruel and earn Dark Side points. There was no room for subtlety and nuance or any notion of relativism.

The most flawed Jedi building also came in what might be the most disappointing *Star Wars* game to date—2003's *Star Wars Galaxies* for the PC. The title was a massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) similar to the immensely popular and hugely successful *World of Warcraft.* The setup allows gamers to create their own characters and play online in a highly complex universe with other players and their characters. These titles require copious amounts of time invested to level-up and make strong characters. Unfortunately, it was nearly impossible to become a Jedi at first in *Galaxies.* Players couldn't start as Jedi and because of poor design they had no idea how to eventually become one. Eventually they realized that you had to master three random classes (each uniquely set when a player created his character), but it took four months of intense gameplay for a single player among the hundreds of thousands to become a Jedi.[8] Eventually, in 2005, developers redesigned the game to allow for easier access to the Jedi class, but these changes only further angered players who had worked for years to achieve Jedi status. The game never became the huge hit many dreamed of, in large part because of restricting access to the Force and lightsabers. The servers hosting the game shut down in December 2011, ending arguably the least successful chapters in *Star Wars* gaming history.[9]

Somehow, in the time since *Knight of the Old Republic, Star Wars* titles have lost the sophistication in dealing with the Light and Dark Sides of the Force. Case in point is *The Force Unleashed.* Instead of making a series of choices about what side Starkiller will follow throughout the game, the player receives a stark branching option at the very end of the game. Either walk your character to the left: fight the Emperor, follow the Light Side of the Force, and get the correct canon ending, or veer slightly more to the right: battle Darth Vader and get the Dark Side ending that doesn't fit with the movies at all. A player can literally just replay the final stage to experience both outcomes. It undermines the idea that one is driven slowly to the dark side, instead substituting a virtual coin flip.

The Force Unleashed II is actually even worse in this effect. Light or Dark, the gamer plays through the story the exact same way and only confronts a conflict after defeating Vader in the final boss battle. Literally, the player

must hit one button or the other to kill or spare Vader. Each option produces a different ending, one Light Side and one Dark Side. It's the last time the player even gets to hit a button in the game.

But in a way, isn't this how the original movie trilogy ends in *Return of the Jedi*? When Luke engages in his lightsaber duel with Vader it acts as the series' final boss battle. After he achieves victory and hacks off his father's hand, Emperor Palpatine saunters over and tells him to finish the job and kill Vader. At this moment, Luke's internal conflict manifests itself clearly across his face. "Should I press the A button, throw down my weapon, and get the Light Side of the Force ending? Or do I hit the B button, kill Vader, and see the Dark Side ending where I become the Emperor's new apprentice?"

This moment directly mirrors the choice given in *The Force Unleashed II*. The difference lies in the fact that in the films viewers see the various choices Luke has to make between the Dark and Light Side, so the climax to *Return of the Jedi* seems more plausible. In *The Force Unleashed II*, there is literally only one time a player gets to make a decision, and it's the very last playable moment. It doesn't earn the ending either way and devalues the importance in the dichotomy of the Force.

★ ★ ★

Make no mistake; *Star Wars* video games aren't going anywhere. As gaming technology continues to advance rapidly, game studios will find new *Star Wars* stories to tell or continue to turn out graphically superior versions of the tales fans already know and love.

Now that the prequels have wrapped up the *Star Wars* movie saga, television offers material on which to base games. Many titles simulate the CGI animated series *The Clone Wars* including *Star Wars: The Clone Wars—Jedi Alliance* (Nintendo DS) and *LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars* (Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS, PlayStation 3, PlayStation Portable, Wii, PC, and Xbox 360). And if the long proposed *Star Wars* live-action TV series ever materializes there will surely be numerous gaming tie-ins.

The *Star Wars* gaming universe saw arguably its biggest release ever in December 2011 with the arrival of *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. The game is a second shot at making a *Star Wars* MMORPG after *Star Wars Galaxies*. Hopes were incredibly high for the title because it was developed by BioWare, the game studio that made *Knight of the Old Republic* and recently has had mass critical and commercial success with the space RPG series *Mass Effect*. Initial reviews were mostly positive and sales were record-breaking—because the MMO business model is based around monthly subscriptions that allow gamers to play online. Only time will tell if it is a massive success.

The recent rise in popularity of motion gaming seems to be a natural fit for all of the lightsaber battling in the *Star Wars* universe. Both *Force Unleashed* games as well as *Star Wars: The Clone Wars—Lightsaber Duels* for the Wii

used the console's motion sensing controller, the Wii Remote, as a virtual lightsaber to slash enemies. *Star Wars* motion gaming will also soon come to Xbox 360 using the system's motion sensing camera, the Microsoft Kinect. *Kinect Star Wars* is set for an April 2012 release and will allow players to move like a Jedi as the camera detects their virtual blaster deflections and lightsaber swings. These motion games could potentially bring players one step closer to actually feeling like a Jedi when playing a *Star Wars* video game by forcing them to reenact the physical moves instead of just tapping a button.

Gaming in the *Star Wars* universe has somewhat muddled the canon mythology. While this certainly upsets fanboys and those trying to discern the most complete and official storyline of all goings-on in a galaxy far, far away, the impact of *Star Wars* video games on the franchise as a whole has been positive. Most importantly, the video games allow gamers to *control* the *Star Wars* universe and become the heroes (and villains) they love, even if it is only through swiveling a joystick and pushing some buttons with their thumbs.

Star Wars video games have come a long way since their simple beginnings on the Atari 2600. In just under two decades, gamers have gone from repetitively blasting never-ending loops of pixilated AT-ATs to traveling across fully realized planets armed with a trusty lightsaber while making moral decisions regarding the Light and Dark Sides of the Force. Over time there have been several titles that excellently soared past the stars and plenty that were so bad that gamers wish they could throw them in a Sarlacc pit. Through it all, the games have expanded the reach of the *Star Wars* universe and introduced new generations to the saga.

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X-Wing—Mac
Star Wars: X-Wing vs. Tie Fighter—Mac
X-Wing Alliance—Windows PC
Star Wars: Rebellion—Windows PC
Star Wars—Nintendo Game Boy
Super Star Wars—Super Nintendo Entertainment System
Super Empire Strikes Back—Super Nintendo Entertainment System
Super Return of the Jedi—Super Nintendo Entertainment System
Star Wars: Episode I: Racer—Nintendo 64
Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire—Nintendo 64
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron—Nintendo 64
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader—Nintendo GameCube
Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace—Sony PlayStation
Star Wars Episode I: Jedi Power Battles—Sega Dreamcast
Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith—PlayStation 2
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic—Xbox
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed—Xbox 360 & Nintendo Wii
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II—Xbox 360
Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga—Xbox 360

12

Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars?

Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture

Henry Jenkins

> We're going to empower a writer, somewhere in the world, who doesn't have filmmaking resources at his or her disposal. This is the future of cinema—*Star Wars* is the catalyst.
>
> Jason Wishnow, maker of the digital film, *Tatooine or Bust*[1]

A grassroots appropriation of *Star Wars* became part of the huge media phenomenon that surrounded first the release of the digitally enhanced original *Star Wars* trilogy in 1997. Spoofs and parodies were, two years later, virtually omnipresent when *The Phantom Menace* received its summer release in 1999. The trailer for *Austin Powers II: The Spy Who Shagged Me* toyed with trigger-happy audiences eagerly anticipating their first glimpse of *TPM*'s preview reel by opening with ominous music, heavy breathing, and a spaceship interior as a voice-over narrator explained, "Years ago, a battle was fought and an empire was destroyed. Now the saga will continue." The chair revolves to reveal not the anticipated Darth Vader (or his latter-day counterpart, Darth Maul) but Doctor Evil, who shrugs: "You were expecting someone else?" Bowing before the competing media phenomenon, *Austin Powers* subsequently premiered with the catch line, "If you see only one movie this summer, see . . . *Star Wars*. If you see two movies, see *Austin Powers*." Simultaneously, *Doonesbury* depicted the "refugee camps" awaiting entry into theaters where *Star Wars* was playing. Weird Al Yankovic, previously successful with the music video "Yoda," offered his prequel "The Saga Begins." *Mad TV* ran two spoofs, one imagining Randy Newman composing feel-good music for the film, the other featuring Lucas as an obnoxious, overweight fanboy in an Ewok costume. David Letterman proposed casting smooth-voiced

singer Barry White as Darth Vader. Accepting Harvard's Hasty Pudding Award, Samuel L. Jackson offered his own imitation of how Yoda might have delivered the actor's lines from Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*.

Most of us can add entries to the above list of mass-market spoofs, parodies, and appropriations, some aimed at the film's director, some at its fans, others at the content of the series, Jar Jar Binks bashing then the order of the day. Such creative reworkings of science-fiction film and television are no longer, and perhaps never were, restricted to a marginalized fan base but have become an increasingly central aspect of how contemporary popculture operates. Too often, fan appropriation and transformation of media content gets marginalized or exoticized, treated as something that people do when they have too much time on their hands. The assumption is that anyone who would invest so much creative and emotional energy into the products of mass culture surely must have something wrong with them. A twenty-first-century perspective posits diehard fans as active participants within the current media revolution, their cultural products an important aspect of the digital cinema movement. If advocates of digital cinema have sought to democratize the means of cultural production, fostering grassroots creativity by opening up the tools of media creation and distribution to a broader segment of the general public, then the rapid proliferation of fan-produced *Star Wars* films represents a significant early success story. Force Flicks, one of several databases, lists almost 300 amateur-produced *Star Wars* films currently in circulation on the web and identifies an even larger number as "in production." A diversity of theme, approach, and quality is represented in this sample of the current state of amateur digital filmmaking. Some such "films" have developed enormous cult followings. Amazon .com, the online bookseller, reports that sales of *George Lucas in Love* was outselling *The Phantom Menace* among their video customers, while *Troops* (which offers a Cops-style behind-the-scenes look at the routine experience of stormtroopers serving their hitch on Tatooine) was featured in a two-page spread in *Entertainment Weekly*. Its director, Kevin Rubio, reportedly attracted offers of production contracts from major studios.

But how and why did *Star Wars* become, in Jason Wishnow's words, a "catalyst" for amateur digital filmmaking? Essentially, *SW* fan-films represent an important intersection of two significant cultural trends: the corporate movement toward media convergence and the unleashing of significant new tools that enable a grassroots archiving, annotation, appropriation, and recirculation of media content. Such "fan films" build on long-standing practices of the fan community while reflecting the influence of a changed technological environment that has dramatically lowered the costs of production and/or distribution. This new context profoundly alters our sense of what amateur cinema is and how it relates to the commercial film industry.

In many regards, *Star Wars* offers the prime example and perfect case study of media convergence at work. Lucas's mid-1970s decision to defer salary for *A New Hope* in favor of maintaining a share of ancillary profits has been widely cited as a turning point. Lucas made a ton of money and 20th Century Fox learned a valuable lesson. Kenner's *Star Wars* action figures are thought to have been key in reestablishing the value of media tie-in products in the toy industry while John Williams's score helped revitalize the market for soundtrack albums. The rich narrative universe of the *Star Wars* saga provided countless images, icons, and artifacts then reproduced in a wide variety of forms and sold to diverse groups of consumers. The careful licensing of the *SW* iconography enabled Lucasfilm to forge strategic alliances with a multitude of corporate partners, including fast food chains and soft drink bottlers, which both exploited and enlarged public interest in any forthcoming release. Consequently, by spring 1999 it was impossible to go anywhere without coming face to face with the distinctive personas of Darth Maul, Queen Amidala, or Jar Jar Binks. This climate of heightened expectations also fostered the production of the various commercial *Star Wars* parodies, mentioned earlier, as other media producers sought to "poke fun" at the hype while tapping into audience awareness of a film's impending release. Letterman's spoofs of *Star Wars* became as much a part of the publicity campaign as were the appearance of Natalie Portman or the other stars on his program. The good-natured *Austin Powers* trailer played with audience anticipation of the *SW* trailer while becoming a vehicle for creating media buzz about both works.

Simultaneously, a succession of new technologies have profoundly altered the patterns of media consumption that enable average citizens to participate in the archiving, annotation, appropriation, transformation, and recirculation of media content. The term "participatory culture" refers to a new style of consumerism still emergent in this environment. Not surprisingly, participatory culture is running ahead of the technological developments, making demands on popular culture that the studios are not yet, and perhaps never will be, able to satisfy. The first demand consumers insist on is the right to participate in the creation and distribution of the narratives they "buy into." Media consumers want to become media producers, while media producers hope to maintain their traditional dominance over creative content and potential product.

A history of participatory culture might start with the photocopier, which quickly became "the people's printing press," paving the way for a broad range of subcultural communities to publish and circulate their perspectives. The Videocassette Recorder (VCR) enabled consumers to bring the broadcast signal more fully under their control and to build large libraries of personally meaningful materials, and increasingly provided tools that facilitated amateur production. By the early 1990s, media fans were using the

VCR to reedit footage of their favorite television programs, enabling them to comment on the relationships between program characters. The availability of low-cost camcorders and more recently, digital cameras has empowered considerably more people to enter into the filmmaking process. Digital photography/audio sampling technologies made it easy to manipulate and rework sights and sounds of our contemporary media environment, paving the way for new forms of cultural expression. These range from Photoshop collages to music sampling. Such technologies do not simply alter the ways that media are produced or consumed; they also help break down barriers of entry into the media marketplace for the public at large.

The Net opened up new space for public discussions of media content while the Web became an important showcase for grassroots cultural production. Prior to its existence, amateurs might write stories, compose music, or make movies, but they had no venue whereby they could exhibit such work beyond their immediate circles of family and friends. In this context, among those "digital movies" indexed by the various *Star Wars* fan websites are Super-8 productions dating back to the original release of *A New Hope* (such as *Star Wars* Remake), only now reaching a broader audience because of their online circulation. The Web made it possible for alternative media productions of all kinds to gain greater visibility. As more amateur works have thus entered into circulation, the result has been a turn toward a folk-cultural understanding and distribution of creativity. Fans respond to this situation by applying the traditional practices of folk culture to mass culture, treating film or television as if it offered them raw materials for telling their own stories, resources for forging communities. Fan culture represents a participatory means through which aficionados explore and question the ideologies of mass culture, speaking from a position sometimes inside and sometimes outside the cultural logic of commercial entertainment. The key difference between fan culture and traditional folk culture doesn't have to do with fan actions with corporate reactions. Robin Hood, Pecos Bill, John Henry, Coyote, and Br'er Rabbit belonged to the folk. Kirk and Spock, Scully and Mulder, or Han and Chewbacca belong to corporations. Fan fiction repairs some of the damage caused by privatization of culture, allowing these potentially rich cultural archetypes to speak to and for a broader range of social and political visions.

In theory, such efforts could increase the commercial value of media products by opening them to new audiences, though producers rarely understand them in those terms.

Consider, for example, this statement made by a fan:

> What I love about fandom is the freedom we have allowed ourselves to create and recreate our characters over and over again. Fanfic rarely sits still. It's like a living, evolving thing, taking on its own life, one story building on another,

each writer's reality bouncing off another's and maybe even melding together to form a whole new creation.[2]

If *Star Wars* served as an important Ur-text for the new corporate strategy of media convergence, Lucas films have also provided a focal point for an enormous quantity of grassroots media production, becoming the embodiment of a new participatory culture. Fans began to write original fiction based on the *Star Wars* characters within a few months of the first film's release, building on an infrastructure for the production and distribution of fanzines that had previously sprouted around *Star Trek*. Fan writers sustained the production of original *Star Wars* stories throughout the "dark years" when Lucas had seemingly turned his back on his own mythology. In time, the release of *The Phantom Menace* provoked an enormous wave of new fan stories on the Web.

Grassroots appropriation and transformation of *Star Wars* has not, however, been restricted to media fandom per se but has spread across other sectors of the new DIY culture. Will Brooker notes a persistence of *Star Wars* references in punk and techno music, British underground comics, novels like Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs*, films such as Kevin Smith's *Clerks*, and various punk, thrasher, and slacker zines. Brooker argues that the rebellion depicted in *SW* provides a useful model for thinking about the coalition-based cultural politics that define the entire DIY movement. The Empire, Brooker argues, is a "colonizing force" that seeks to impose top-down regimentation and demand conformity to its dictates. The Rebellion is a ragtag coalition of different races and cultures, a temporary alliance based on constant flux and movement from base to base, dependent upon often decentralized and democratic forms of decision making.[3]

Ironically, given the film's embrace of the rebel perspective, Lucasfilm, through the years, has been one of the most aggressive corporate groups in trying to halt fan cultural production, viewing it primarily as a threat to their control over intellectual property. Yet if Lucasfilm's legal departments, like those of many other studios, have advocated the rigorous enforcement of intellectual property law as a means of regulating the flow of media materials, creative departments often display a rather different understanding of the intersection between media convergence and participatory culture. The culture industry has its own reasons for encouraging active, rather than passive, modes of consumption. They seek consumers who are mobile, who move between different media channels, establishing meaningful links between different manifestations of the same story. As a result, media producers are consciously building into their texts opportunities for fan elaboration and collaboration—codes to be deciphered, enigmas to be resolved, loose ends to be woven together, teasers and spoilers for upcoming developments. So they leak information to the media, which sparks controversy and speculation.

Media producers also actively monitor and, in some cases, directly participate in the fan discussions on the Web as a means of measuring grassroots response to their productions.

The products emerging within this new media culture, then, are more complex in their reliance on backstory and foreshadowing, more dependent on audience members' familiarity with character history, more open to serialization, genre-mixing, and crossovers between different fictional universes. Also, they are more playful in their reliance on in-joke references or spoofing of other media content. As such, these media producers rely on audience access to an archive of episodes on the informational infrastructure provided by various fan-generated websites. At the same time, the most adept fan producers are, in fact, using the Web to reinforce or expand on the information contained in the commercial material. *SW* fan-filmmakers have negotiated a place for themselves somewhere in between competing, seemingly polar, trends, coexisting with the mainstream media while opening up an arena for grassroots creativity. As amateur filmmakers Adam Dorr, Erik Benson, Hien Nguyen, and Jon Jones claimed about their own work in such a vein:

> *Maru* pays homage to *Star Wars* and is intended to demonstrate to everyone who spent their entire childhood dreaming of wielding a lightsaber that inspired personal visions can now be realized using tools that are readily available to all of us. *Maru* was made using a camcorder and a PC with a budget of about $500. . . . Technology and the new media facilitate the articulation and exchange of ideas in ways never before imagined, and we hope that others will harness the power of these tools as we have in order to share their dreams with the world.[4]

Perhaps the best known of all *SW* parodies, *George Lucas in Love* depicts the future media mastermind as a clueless USC film student who can't come up with a good idea for his production assignment. His stoner roommate emerges from behind the hood of his dressing gown and lectures Lucas on "this giant cosmic force, an energy field created by all living things." His sinister next-door-neighbor, an archrival, dresses all in black and breathes with an asthmatic wheeze as he proclaims, "My script is complete. Soon I will rule the entertainment universe." As Lucas races to class, he encounters a brash young friend who brags about his souped-up sports car and a furry-faced sidekick who growls when he hits his head on the hood while trying to complete basic repairs. His professor, a smallish man, babbles cryptic advice; all of this adds up to little until Lucas meets and falls madly for a beautiful young woman with hair-buns on both sides of her head. Alas, the romance leads to naught as he eventually discovers she is his long-lost sister. *GLIL* is, of course, a spoof of *Shakespeare in Love* as well as a tribute from one generation of USC film students to another. As co-director Joseph

Levy, a twenty-four-year-old grad from Lucas's alma mater, explained, "Lucas is definitely the god of USC. . . . We shot our screening-room scene in the George Lucas Instructional Building—Lucas is incredibly supportive of student filmmakers and developing their careers and providing facilities for them to be caught up to technology."[5]

Yet what qualifies this film as endearing is the way in which it pulls Lucas down to the same level of countless other amateur filmmakers and, in so doing, helps blur the line between the fantastical realm of space opera ("A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away") and the familiar realm of everyday life. *GLIL* offers a portrait of the artist as a young geek. One might contrast this down-to-earth representation of Lucas—the auteur as amateur—with the way fan filmmaker Evan Mather's website constructs the amateur as an emergent auteur. Along one column of the site sits a filmography listing all Mather's productions going back to high school, as well as a listing of various papers, magazines, websites, TV, and radio stations that have covered his work—*La Republica*, *Le Monde*, the *New York Times*, *Wired*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *CNN*, *NPR*, and so forth. Another sidebar provides up-to-the-moment information about his works in progress.

Elsewhere, you can see news of various film festival screenings of his films and whatever awards they have won. More than nineteen digital films are featured, with photographs, descriptions, and links that enable you to download them in multiple formats. Another link opens a PDF file reproducing a glossy full-color, professionally designed brochure documenting the making of his most recent work, *Les Pantless Menace*, which includes close-ups of various props and settings, reproductions of stills, score sheets, and storyboards, and detailed explanations of how he was able to do the special effects, soundtrack, and editing for the film. While these materials serve useful functions within an amateur film culture, often helping other fans learn how to create their own special effects, these mechanisms of self-promotion also suggest that the amateurs' grasp of the art of "high-concept" filmmaking (and the franchise system it supports) values the art of advertising and marketing as much as the art of storytelling.

Many of these fan-filmmakers, after all, had their first advance-glimpse of footage from *The Phantom Menace* by downloading the much-publicized trailer. In many cases, fan parodies of the trailer appeared in those months during which these dual consumer/producers were eagerly awaiting a chance to see the film itself. In some early examples, they simply re-dubbed the original trailer with alternative soundtracks, in other cases remaking the trailer shot-by-shot. Downloading the trailer inspired Ayaz Asif to produce a parody employing characters taken from *South Park*. When an acquaintance, Ted Bracewell, sent him a wallpaper he had drawn depicting *South Park* characters in *Star Wars* garb, the two decided to collaborate, resulting in a "trailer" for *Park Wars: The Little Menace*, in time a more elaborately

made "special edition," and finally a series of shorts based on the *Star Wars* version of the *South Park* characters. The production received such media interest, including an interview with Asif during a Sy-Fy Channel documentary, that the young filmmakers ultimately were invited to air it on Comedy Central, the same network that produced Trey Parker and Matt Stone's series. All of this publicity surrounding the *Star Wars* parodies serves as a reminder of what is one of the most distinctive qualities of these amateur films: the fact that they are so public.

Mather and other digital filmmakers tackle the challenge of making *Star Wars* movies for differing reasons. *Kid Wars* director Dana Smith was a fourteen-year-old who had recently acquired a camcorder and decided to stage scenes from *SW* with his younger brother and friends who armed themselves for battle with squirt guns and Nerf weapons. Members of a wedding party shot *The Jedi Who Loved Me*, intended as a tribute to the bride and groom, both avid *SW* fans. Some films, such as *Macbeth*, began as school projects. Two high school students—Bienvenido Concepcion and Don Fitz-Roy—shot the piece, which creatively blurs the lines between Lucas and Shakespeare, for their high school advanced-placement English class. The gifted amateurs staged lightsaber battles running down the school hallway, though the principal expressed concern about potential damage to lockers; the *Millennium Falcon* lifted off from the gym, though they had to composite the spacecraft over practicing cheerleaders.

Other films emerged as collective projects for various *Star Wars* fan clubs. *Boba Fett: Bounty Trail* was produced for a competition hosted by a Melbourne, Australia, Lucasfilm convention. Each cast member made his or her own costumes, building on previous experience with sci-fi masquerades and costume contests. The film's stiffest competition for first place came from *Dark Redemption*, a production of the Sydney fan community. This project featured a light-saber-waving female protagonist, Mara Jade.

The fan-filmmakers' personal motives for making each film are of secondary interest, however, once these are distributed on the Web. If such works attract worldwide interest, it isn't because people care much whether Concepcion and Fitz-Roy earned a good grade on their assignment; we are unlikely to know any of the members of the wedding party that made *The Jedi Who Loved Me*. What motivates far-away viewers to watch is a shared investment in the *Star Wars* universe. In a tangible sense, digital filmmaking has blurred the line between amateur and professional, projects made for miniscule budgets duplicating special effects that would have cost a fortune to generate only a decade earlier. Amateur filmmakers can allow pod racers to skim along the surface of the ocean or landspeeders to scatter dust as they zoom across the desert. They can make laser beams shoot out of ships and explode things before our eyes. As amateur filmmakers are quick to note, Lucas and Steven Spielberg both made Super-8 fiction films as teenagers

and recall this experience as a major influence on their subsequent work. These "movie brat" filmmakers have been quick to embrace the potentials of digital filmmaking, not simply as a means of lowering production costs for their films but also as a training ground for new talent. As Lucas told *Wired* magazine,

> Some of the special effects that we redid for *Star Wars* were done on a Macintosh, on a laptop, in a couple of hours. . . . I could have very easily shot the *Young Indy* TV series on Hi-8. . . . So you can get a Hi-8 camera for a few thousand bucks, more for the software and the computer for less than $10,000 you have a movie studio. There's nothing to stop you from doing something provocative and significant in that medium.[6]

Elsewhere Lucas paid tribute to several of the fan filmmakers, including Kevin Rubio (director of *Troops*) and Joe Nussbaum (*George Lucas in Love*). Lucas's rhetoric about the potentials of digital filmmaking apparently has captured the imaginations of amateur filmmakers, now struggling to confront the master on his own ground. These talents currently employ digital cinema to create a more vivid version of their childhood fantasies than was heretofore possible. As Clay Kronke, a Texas A&M undergraduate who made *The New World*, explained,

> This film has been a labor of love. A venture into a new medium. . . . I've always loved lightsabers and the mythos of the Jedi and after getting my hands on some software that would allow me to actually become what I had once only admired at a distance, a vague idea soon started becoming a reality. . . . Dude, we're gonna be Jedi.[7]

Kronke openly celebrates that he made the film on a $26.79 budget with most of the props and costumes part of their preexisting collections of *Star Wars* paraphernalia. The biggest problem they faced on the set was the tendency of their plastic lightsabers to break after clashing together once too often. Also, those sound effects he wasn't able to borrow from a *Phantom Menace* PC game were "follied around my apartment, including the sound of a coat hanger against a metal flashlight, my microwave door, and myself falling on the floor several times."

The amateur's pride in re-creating professional-quality special effects often competes with a recognition of the enormous gap between their own productions and the big-budget Hollywood film they mimic. Scholars and critics writing about Third World filmmaking have productively described such works as an "imperfect cinema," noting the ways in which filmmakers have had to deal with low budgets and limited access to high-tech production facilities, making it impossible to compete with Hollywood on its own terms. Instead, such filmmakers made a virtue out of their limitations

by spoofing genre conventions and stylistic norms through films that are intentionally crude or ragged in style. The abruptness in editing, roughness of camera movement, grittiness of film stock, and unevenness of lighting have become markers of authenticity, a direct challenge to the polished look of big-budget screen productions. These amateur filmmakers have also recognized and made their peace with the fact that digital cinema, with its small and grainy images, is a poor substitute for the larger-than-life qualities of Lucas's original films when projected on a big screen with Dolby Surroundsound. The trailer for the *Battle of the Bedroom* promises "lots of dodgy special effects," while the team that made *When Senators Attack* chose to call themselves Ultracheese Ltd. In some cases, the films are truly slapdash, relishing their sloppy special effects, embarrassing delivery, and salvage store costumes. The collaborators behind *The Throne Room*, for example, brag that it was shot and edited in only thirty minutes, and it shows. Two hammy adolescents cut up in home movie footage clearly shot in their living room and inserted into the throne room sequence from *A New Hope* to suggest their flirtation with Princess Leia. In others, productions are relatively polished, yet the filmmakers still take pleasure in showing the seams. Setting its story in "a long time ago in a galaxy far cheaper than this one," Keri Llewellyn's technically accomplished *Star Wars* reproduces the assault on the Death Star, using origami-folded paper TIE fighters and a basketball painted white as a stand-in for the Death Star. As it bursts into flames, we hear a loud boing as the elastic string holding it in space snaps and the object hilariously falls out of the frame.

Yet if true Third World filmmakers saw "imperfect cinema" as the basis for an implicit, occasionally explicit critique of the ideologies and market forces behind the Hollywood Blockbuster, their own parodies of American genre films an attempt to "destroy the very toys of mystification," no such radical goal governs the production of these amateur films. They have indeed turned toward parody as the most effective genre for negotiating between competing desires to reproduce, not destroy the special effects at the heart of the contemporary blockbuster and acknowledge their own amateur status. Yet their parody is almost always affectionate, rarely attempting to make an explicit critical, much less political, statement. A notable exception may be *Tie-Tanic*, which directly references the huge corporate apparatus behind *Star Wars*' success and calls into question the franchising of contemporary popular culture. The filmmaker, John Bunt, redubbed a sequence from the original *SW* depicting a conference between Darth Vader, Grand Moff Tarkin, and other imperial forces so that it now represented a Lucasfilm marketing meeting as corporate execs plot to rob consumers of entertainment dollars.

Still, such an overt—if relatively tame—critique is the exception rather than the rule. More often, these amateur filmmakers see themselves as actively

promoting media texts that they admire. *Shadows of the Empire* is a unauthorized fan-made adaptation of Steve Perry's commercial *Star Wars* novel. Perry's original explored events that occurred between the end of *Empire Strikes Back* and the opening moments of *Return of the Jedi*. *Shadows of the Empire* has proven especially popular with *SW* fans because it pays significant attention to the bounty hunter, Boba Fett, a character relatively marginal to the original films but central to the fan culture. Frustrated that this novel had never been adapted to the screen, fan filmmakers Jeff Hendrich and Bob Branch created their own serialization of the story: "We pooled every *Star Wars* action-figure and toy that we could beg, borrow or steal to make up the cast of the film. The occasional special guest toy stands in for the characters we just couldn't find and as extras in the crowd scenes."[8] Though the adaptation was unauthorized, it nevertheless follows the logic of the franchise system itself.

The Qui-Gon Show imports the blurring between professional and fan efforts that occurs in this context. The script emerged as part of AtomFilms .com's "Makin' Wookie" competition, a commercially sponsored contest that attracted more than 300 amateur and semi-professional entries, including such promising titles as *Mos Angeles*, *The Real World—Tatooine*, *Springer Wars*, *Star Wars: Close Encounters*, and *Wookie Nights*. Atomfilms then provided a budget for several of the more acclaimed fan filmmakers, including Wishnow and Mather, to produce a short based on Robert Fyvolent's contest-winning script. As with *The Qui-Gon Show*, many of the films have been distributed through the new commercial sites devoted to digital cinema and in several notable cases have been released on commercial video.

Even in the absence of such direct commercial connections, the mass marketing of *SW* inadvertently provided resources needed to support these productions. The amateur filmmakers often make use of commercially available costumes and props, sample music from the soundtrack album, and sounds of *SW* videos or computer games, as well as drawing advice on special effects techniques from television documentaries and mass-market magazines. The makers of *Duel* described the sources for their soundtrack:

> We sampled most of the lightsaber sounds from the *Empire Strikes Back* Special Edition laserdisc, and a few from *A New Hope*. *Jedi* was mostly useless to us, as the lightsaber battles in the film are always accompanied by music. The kicking sounds are really punch sounds from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and there's one sound—hideous running across the sand—that we got from *Lawrence of Arabia*. Music, of course, comes from the *Phantom Menace* soundtrack.[9]

In contrast, some filmmakers made use of images from the films themselves though added soundtracks from other sources. *Stooge Wars*, for example, juxtaposes footage of Darth Vader and the stormtroopers with sounds and dialogue sampled from *I'll Never Heil Again*, a Three Stooges short that featured Moe as Hitler.

The availability of such various ancillary products has encouraged fan filmmakers to, since childhood, construct their own fantasies within the *SW* universe. Lucasfilm and Kenner may have initially understood their action figures as commodities, yet the cultural effects reach much deeper. The action figures provided this generation with some of their earliest avatars, encouraging them to assume the role of a Jedi Knight or an intergalactic bounty hunter, enabling them to physically manipulate characters and props to construct their own stories. Fans note that the Boba Fett action figure, more than the character's small role in the films, helped make this character a favorite among digital filmmakers. As children, fans fleshed out Boba Fett's intentionally murky personality, giving him (or her) motives, goals, and conflicts, inspiring plots of a number of amateur movies.

Not surprisingly, a significant number of filmmakers in their late teens and early twenties have turned toward those action figures as resources for their first production efforts. *Toy Wars* producers Aaron Halon and Jason VandenBerghe have launched an ambitious plan to produce a shot-by-shot remake of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* cast entirely with action figures. Other filmmakers mix and match action figures from multiple fictional universes to create new works. *Battle of the Bedroom* (Scott Middlebrook) teams Princess Leia and *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft against Imperial stormtroopers in a duel that rocks a suburban home to its foundation. The *Enterprise* then arrives with a well-timed message of peace, provoking combatants on both sides to open fire and blast the federation starship.

No digital filmmaker has pushed the aesthetics of the action figure as far as Mather. His films—*Godzilla Versus Disco Lando, Kung-fu Kenobi's Big Adventure,* and *Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars*—represent a no-holds-barred romp through contemporary popular culture. The rock-'em-sock-'em action of *KfKBA* appears against the backdrop of settings sampled from the film, drawn by hand, or built from Lego blocks, with the eclectic and evocative soundtrack borrowed from Neil Diamond, *Mission Impossible, Pee-Wee's Big Adventure,* and *A Charlie Brown Christmas.* Dialogue in Mather's movies is often sampled from the original films or elsewhere in popular culture. *Disco Lando* puts the moves on everyone from Admiral Ackbar to Jabba's blue-skinned dancing girl and all of his pick-up lines come from the soundtrack of *The Empire Strikes Back.* Mace Windu "gets medieval" on the Jedi Council, delivering Samuel L. Jackson's lines from *Pulp Fiction* before shooting up the place. The camera focuses on the bald head of a dying Darth Vader as he gasps "Rosebud." Rebels and stormtroopers battle it out on the snowy landscape of Hoth while cheery yuletide music plays in the background.

If action figure filmmakers have developed an aesthetic based on appropriation of materials from the mainstream media, mainstream media has been quick to imitate that aesthetic. MTV's *Celebrity Death Match* creates its action figures using clay-mation, staging World Wrestling Federation–style

bouts between various celebrities, some likely (Monica Lewinsky against Hillary Clinton), some bizarre (the rock star formerly known as Prince against Prince Charles). Screenwriter/director Steve Oedekerk (*Ace Ventura 2, The Nutty Professor, Patch Adams*) produced *ThumbWars* using thumbs, dressed in elaborate costumes, as his primary performers, then digitally adding facial features and expressions. UPN aired the decisively low-tech and low-humor result the week the first *SW* prequel opened in the theaters. In the context of such unlikely cult TV productions it becomes plausible to imagine the creation of a high-quality fan film for Web distribution as a "try-out" for eventually gaining access into the media industries.

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In conclusion, we are witnessing the emergence of an elaborate feedback loop between the emerging "DIY" aesthetics of participatory culture and the mainstream industry. This process is illustrated aptly by considering the work of popular artists like Smith, Tarantino, Mike Judge, Matt Groening, and Kevin Williamson, whose films and TV series reflect this mainstreaming of fan aesthetics and politics. Their work often deals explicitly with the process of forming one's own mythology using images borrowed from mass media. One of the protagonists of *Pulp Fiction*, for example, decides that he wants to "wander the earth" like Caine in television's *Kung Fu*. *Reservoir Dogs* opens with a five-minute discussion of the erotic connotations of Madonna's "Like a Virgin," defining the characters primarily through their relationships to popular culture. Tarantino's tendency toward quotation runs riot in the famous Jack Flash restaurant sequence in *Pulp Fiction*, where all of the service personnel are impersonating iconic figures of the 1950s and the menu employs several comedy teams to designate different shake flavors. As the John Travolta character explains, "It's like a wax museum with a pulse," a phrase that might describe Tarantino's entire approach to filmmaking. Not surprisingly, the works of these "video store filmmakers" have been deeply influential on the emerging generation of amateur digital filmmakers—almost as influential, in fact, as *SW* itself. Jeff Allen, a twenty-seven-year-old "HTML monkey" for an Atlanta Internet company, made *Trooperclerks*, a spoof of the trailer for *Clerks*, which deals with the drab routine confronted by stormtroopers who work in convenience stores and video rental outlets onboard the Death Star. The short spoof, which was immediately embraced and promoted by Kevin Smith's View Askew, was later followed by a half-hour animated film based on the same premise. This was in response to the news that *Clerks* was being adapted into an animated network series. Allen's focus on *Clerks* came only after he considered and rejected the thought of doing a *Star Wars* parody based on Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* Similarly, Allen Smith heads a team that is producing a feature-length animated film, *Pulp Phantom*, offering a scene-by-scene spoof of

Pulp Fiction, recast with characters from *Star Wars*. "Fanboy" filmmakers like Smith and Tarantino are thus inspiring the efforts of the next generation of amateur filmmakers, who are developing, in turn, cult followings that may ultimately gain them access to the commercial mainstream.

So what is the future of digital cinema? One position sees digital cinema as an extension of avant-garde filmmaking, opening a new space for formal experimentation and alternative cultural politics, offering experimental artists access to a broader public. An alternative position, represented by the founders of Pop.com, sees the digital cinema as a potential new site for commercial developments, an extension of the logic of media convergence, an MTV for the twenty-first century. In this vision, established filmmakers, such as Spielberg or Tim Burton, can produce shorter, riskier projects, emerging talents can develop production skills, and works may move fluidly back and forth between the Web, TV, film, and computer games. Interestingly, both groups wish to tap into the hipness of "DIY" culture, promoting their particular vision of the future of digital cinema in terms of democratic participation and amateur self-expression. Both visions have inherent limitations: the "low-res" movement's appeals to avant-garde aesthetics may well prove as elitist as the earlier film movements it seeks to supplant, while a new commercial version of the digital cinema may re-inscribe the same cultural gatekeepers who have narrowed the potential diversity of network TV or Hollywood cinema. The *SW* fan films represent a potentially important third in-between space. Shaped by that intersection between contemporary trends toward media convergence and participatory culture, they are hybrid by nature—neither fully commercial nor fully alternative, existing as part of a grassroots dialogue with mass culture. We are witnessing the transformation of amateur film culture from a focus on home movies toward public movies, from local audiences in favor of a potential global audience, from mastering technology toward perfecting the mechanisms for publicity and promotion, and from self-documentation toward a new aesthetic based on appropriation, parody, and the dialogic.

NOTES

1. Atomfilms, "Internet Users are Makin' Wookie!" press release, April 23, 1999.

2. Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins, and Henry Jenkins, "The Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking," in *Theorizing Fandom*, ed. Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander (New York: Hampton, 1998).

3. Will Brooker, "New Hope: The Postmodern Project of *Star Wars*," in *Postmodern After-Images*, ed. Peter Brooker and Will Brooker (London: Arnold, 1997). See also Will Brooker, *Using the Force* (London: Continuum, 2002).

4. "A Word from Adam Dorr, Director of Maru," TheForce.Net, n.d., http://www.theforce.net/fanfilms/shortfilms/maru/director_maru.asp.

5. Paul Clinton, "Filmmakers Score with 'Lucas in Love,'" CNN, June 24, 1999, http://www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9906/24/movies.lucas.love.

6. Kevin Kelly and Paula Parisi, "Beyond Star Wars," *Wired* 5, no. 2, February 1997, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.02/fflucas_pr.html.

7. Clay Kronke, "Director's Note for *The New World*," TheForce.Net, no longer online.

8. Jim Hendrich and Bob Branch, *Shadows of the Empire*, no longer online.

9. Mark Thomas and Dave Macomber, *Duel*, no longer online.

13

Star Wars and the Technophobic Imagination

Cyrus R. K. Patell

Why must Luke Skywalker turn off his computer in order to destroy the Death Star at the climax of *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977)?

We know the answer to this question within the narrative framework that George Lucas establishes for us during the film. Darth Vader tells us why: Scoffing at an Imperial general's contention that the battle station known as the Death Star is "the ultimate power in the universe," Vader proclaims, "Don't be too proud of this technological terror you've constructed. The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force."[1] But why create this narrative logic at all? What larger ideological contexts lie behind it? What set of cultural hopes and anxieties could underlie the mythology of the Jedi and their relationship to the Force?

Let me suggest to you that a crucial component of the cultural logic that animates not only the *Star Wars* films but also the various *Star Trek* series and a host of other popular late-twentieth-century representations of advanced technology is, in fact, technophobia—the fear of technology. These representations are symptomatic of deep anxieties about the erosion of individual agency that have a long history in Western culture, but seem to have become intensified by the rapidity of technological change in the late twentieth century. Today, however, technophobia also often serves as a cultural metaphor for other sorts of anxieties. Pop representations of technophobia are often about more than simply the threat to individualism that technology is thought to pose: they are also about the fear that individuality and agency are somehow being threatened by social changes linked to class, race, ethnicity, and gender relations.

I offer what follows as an example of what we commonly call "cultural studies" in the United States. This approach draws on two distinct but related senses of the term *culture*. One comes from anthropology: *culture* signifies a whole way of life. A second sense of the word is used when we talk about arts and letters: *culture* as a set of intellectual and artistic activities. This meaning carries with it a hint of elitism: to be cultured is to be educated, to be able to understand and enjoy forms of intellectual and artistic life that the less fortunate might find inaccessible. *Cultural studies* examines what happens when these two meanings collide.

The term *cultural studies* arose or, at least, was institutionalized in Great Britain in the 1960s at the University of Birmingham. According to the anthropologist James Clifford, "Cultural studies in Britain emerged with the New Left and a theoretically supple neo-Marxism. It has been associated with adult and popular education movements, working-class politics, and more recently with new social movements based on gender, sexuality, ethnicity, anti-racism and anti-militarism."[2] In the United States, *cultural studies* retains some of these associations, but focuses on the democratizing impulses of the discipline (rather than the leftist political agenda of its British counterpart). Although occasionally identified with ethnic studies (providing a generic rubric for the interdisciplinary work of African American Studies, Chicano Studies, or Native American Studies to name a few), what became the dominant trend in late-twentieth-century U.S. cultural studies was the effort to break down the traditional distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow culture. Literary critic Gerald Graff provided a very useful description of this trend, arguing that the point of cultural studies was

> not to scrap the classics and substitute "Westerns as lit" for "Western lit," or to declare, "Say goodnight, Socrates," as some ill-informed news reports have . . . complained. The point is not to get rid of the classics but to teach the classics in relation to the challenges being posed to them. It is not, in other words, a question of substituting Rambo for Rimbaud so much as putting highbrow and lowbrow traditions back into the dialogical relation in which they have actually existed in our cultural history.[3]

We need, in other words, to be able talk about both Rambo and Rimbaud, and to understand how the cultural traditions that each represents are interrelated.

Cultural studies both in the United States and in Great Britain frequently takes as its object of study the relationship between representation and ideology. Like early Marxist thinkers, when cultural studies scholars speak of "ideology" they are talking about consciousness, but they do not see it necessarily as "false" consciousness: what they stress is that an ideology is

an internalized mode of consciousness that serves as a kind of social glue. Ideology acts as an interpretive lens or filter that enables people to make sense of each other and the world.

A good working definition of *ideology* comes from the historian David Brion Davis, who uses the term to mean

> an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions, and values, not necessarily true or false, which reflects the needs and interests of a group or class at a particular time in history. By "interest" I mean anything that benefits or is thought to benefit a specific collective identity. Because ideologies are modes of consciousness, containing the criteria for interpreting social reality, they help to define as well as to legitimate collective needs and interests. Hence there is a continuous interaction between ideology and the material forces of history. The salient characteristic of an ideology is that, while it is taken for granted by people who have internalized it, it is never the eternal or absolute truth it claims to be. Ideologies focus attention on certain phenomena, but only by arbitrarily screening out other phenomena in patterns that are not without meaning.[4]

This conception of ideology is indebted to French neo-Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's interpretation of Karl Marx's *Capital*. Althusser claimed that although Marx does not explicitly name the concept of ideology in *Capital*, it is implicit throughout the book. Althusser described ideology as "a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society."[5] Elaborating upon Althusser's theory, the sociologist Stuart Hall writes that "ideologies do not operate through single ideas"; rather, "they operate, in discursive chains, in clusters, in semantic fields, in discursive formations. As you enter an ideological field and pick out any one nodal representation or idea, you immediately trigger off a whole chain of connotative associations. Ideological representations connote—summon—one another."[6] Each of the representations generated within an ideological field derives from one or more associations, but these representations are themselves linked to one another as sequences of thought. Within an ideological field, certain dominant strands, certain characteristic patterns of reasoning, eventually emerge, becoming evident throughout a broad range of different discourses.

My goal here is to tug at the strand revealed to us by the conclusion of *Star Wars: A New Hope*. What characteristic patterns of reasoning lie behind it? What different discursive chains and semantic fields might we discover by asking the question, "Why must Luke Skywalker turn off his computer in order to destroy the Death Star?"

★ ★ ★

As of mid-September 2011, three *Star Wars* films were among the top fifteen on the all-time U.S. box-office list:

Avatar (2009)
Titanic (1997)
The Dark Knight (2008)
Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope (1977)
Shrek 2 (2004)
E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982)
Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace (1999)
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (2006)
Toy Story 3 (2010)
Spider-Man (2002)
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (2009)
Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith (2005)
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 (2011)
Spider-Man 2 (2004)

The rest of the list is rife with films that draw on the technophobic imagination. *Transformers* features giant robots from outer space, many of which are out to destroy humankind. The *Lord of the Rings* films are, at least in part, about the dangers of industrialization (think of Saruman's tearing down forests to manufacture his Uruk-hai warriors and their weapons). Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* plays on our fears of technology: in the tense final half-hour of the film, we assume that the men in the environmental suits seeking to find E.T. are up to no good. In the *Spider-Man* films, Peter Parker develops his strange new powers after being bitten by a genetically engineered super-spider (updated from the radioactive spider that appeared in the original comic book), while the Green Goblin and Doc Ock are the results of new military technology gone awry. The number-two film of all time, *Titanic*, has a deep undercurrent of technophobia running within it. It may be a sentimental and tragic love story, but it is also a story about a technological disaster caused by scientific hubris: the "unsinkable" ship that fails to live up to its billing. And *Avatar* is about the misuse of technology by a greedy corporation intent on strip-mining a planet full of natural marvels. All of these films dramatize deep-seated fears that humanity will be unable to control the technologies that it creates.

In *Star Trek*—one of the most successful science fiction series of all time—we find a similar undercurrent of technophobia. Many episodes of the original *Star Trek* television series pitted Captain Kirk and his comrades

against machines that sought to restrict the freedom and autonomy of human beings. Although *Star Trek* did celebrate the technological advances that were making space travel a reality in the 1960s, the show frequently dramatized the need for technology to remain under human control, a theme that marks all of the subsequent *Star Trek* films and television series.

Still, it seems counterintuitive: How can *Star Wars*, a movie that led to a revolution in special effects technology, possibly be an example of technophobia? Technophobia is often a response to—and therefore is often accompanied by—its opposite, *technophilia*, the love of technology. As Isaac Asimov has pointed out, "any technological advance, however fundamental, has the double aspect of good / harm and, in response is viewed with a double aspect of love / fear." Asimov gives the examples of two early technological advances within primitive human cultures: the controlling of fire and the making of weapons. "Fire warms you, gives you light, cooks your food, smelts your ore—and out of control, burns and kills. Your knives and spears kill your animal enemies and your human foes and, out of your control, are used by your foes to kill you."[7] Technology can be celebrated, but only as long as it remains instrumental. The successful special-effects film itself might represent an example of the proper use of technology.

The suspicion of technology at work in *Star Wars* is a manifestation of larger fears about the erosion of traditional individualism. The *Star Wars* films invested deeply in individualist mythologies. For example, when Obi-Wan Kenobi realizes that the Death Star's tractor beam must be neutralized if the *Millennium Falcon* is to complete its mission in the first *Star Wars* film, he tells Luke and Han, "I don't think you boys can help. I must go alone."[8] When Darth Vader becomes aware of Obi-Wan's presence on the station, he tells Grand Moff Tarkin: "Escape is not his plan. I must face him alone."[9]

Moments of single combat lie at the heart of the *Star Wars* films, and indeed it is a moment of one-on-one confrontation toward which the series builds. George Lucas describes the logic behind the death of Yoda early in *Return of the Jedi* this way: "As you're building to the climax of an endeavor such as this, you want the situation to get more and more desperate and you want the hero to lose whatever crutches he or she has helping along the way. One of the challenges here is that Luke should be completely on his own. He has to face the Emperor one on one."[10] In the catalog accompanying the National Air and Space Museum's exhibition "*Star Wars*: The Magic of Myth," Mary Henderson locates a large part of the appeal of Lucas's films in the fact that they portray a hero who "enter[s] the wilderness outside the technologically controlled world in order to discover the human animal inside the social machine. The hero can then assert his individualism instead of becoming a servant to the machine."[11]

Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope was one of a number of films released in the late 1970s and early 1980s that promoted a mythology of rugged

individualism based on single combat in which technology is seen as a necessary evil at best: it must either remain firmly under human control or be avoided altogether. To cite only two examples, in 1985's *Rocky IV*, our hero Rocky Balboa's regimen of chopping down trees, hauling dogsleds, and carrying logs in the snow of Siberia enables him to defeat a Soviet boxer trained with the latest sports technology. In the 1987 film *Predator*, Arnold Schwarzenegger's commando must battle an extraterrestrial hunter of human beings who is equipped with incredibly advanced weaponry and tracking systems. So how does Schwarzenegger's character defeat this alien and its superhuman technology? By covering himself in mud, building traps made with wooden stakes, and using a bow and arrow. Low tech is the mark of the true individualist.

Technology is supposed to extend both individuality and agency. The Greek root *techno* means "art or skill," and technology is supposed to be about designing tools, machines, and techniques that can make us more skillful, that enhance our ability to act in the world. But does it? Are we compromised if we use a tool rather than our own two hands, if we require the assistance of technology to achieve our ends? Can we take full credit for our achievements if we need technological assistance? We probably would not consider someone who uses a computer-aided-design program to create an image to be as true an artist as someone who uses pencil and paint. We do not allow athletes to take advantage of biotechnological advances such as steroids, for example. Indeed, this example suggests a further fear, that we might be damaging ourselves as we use technology. Is it possible that reliance on technology erodes our ability to be self-reliant, to be independent and autonomous? Does it compromise our very identity?

Plato thought so. He may well be one of the earliest recorded human technophobes in Western culture. He was wary of the changes coming about by a revolution in communications technology—namely, the invention of writing. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato recounts how Socrates argues that writing is a tool that diminishes us: it weakens our memories and makes us think we know more than we do. It is a crutch for the mind. It is, says Socrates, "but a reminiscence of what we know." Moreover, written texts cannot defend themselves, respond to questions, or clarify their arguments; they are imprecise and static. What is better than the written text, according to Socrates, is oral speech, because it is dynamic. For these reasons, reliance on technology is dangerous and unwise in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

In John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667), it is dangerous and even immoral. In Book 6 of the poem, the apostate angel Lucifer proves his unworthiness by violating the traditional rules of combat during the war in heaven between his force of Rebel Angels and the forces of God, led by the archangels Michael and Gabriel. After suffering losses during the first day's fighting, Lucifer devises what Milton calls "devlish Engines": he

builds cannons capable of simulating the wrath of God's thunder. The angel Raphael—who is recounting the story of the battle to Adam—describes Satan's invention as a "fraud." The cannons work at first:

> From those deep throated Enginsbelcht, whose roar
> Emboweld with outragious noise the Air,
> And all her entrails tore, disgorging foule
> Thir devilish glut, chaind Thunderbolts and Hail
> Of Iron Globes, which on the Victor Host
> Level'd, with such impetuous furie smote,
> That whom they hit, none on thir feet might stand,
> Though standing else as Rocks, but down they fell
> By thousands, Angel on Arch-Angel rowl'd;
> The sooner for thir Arms, unarm'd they might
> Have easily as Spirits evaded swift
> By quick contraction or remove; but now
> Foule dissipation follow'd and forc't rout;
> Nor served' it to relax their serried files. (II. 586–600)

Raphael describes this setback as an "indecent overthrow" (l. 602), and it does not last for long. Finding their weapons to be an impediment that prevents them from making tactical use of their abilities as "Spirits," the angels perform a version of Luke Skywalker's decision to turn off his computer: they finally throw away "Thir Arms" and "From their foundations loosning to and fro / They pluckt the seated Hills with all their load" (II. 643–44) and bury Satan and his allies "Under the weight of Mountains" (I. 652). To add insult to injury, the devils find that "Thir armor help'd their harm, crush't in and brus'd / Into their substance pent, which wrought them pain / Implacable, and many a dolorous groan" (II. 656–58). In *Paradise Lost*, reliance on technology is the Devil's strategy.[12]

Paradise Lost was published in 1667, but a similar conception of what kind of weaponry is morally permissible on a battlefield can be found more than two hundred years later. In *The Social History of the Machine Gun*, John Ellis argues that the machine gun, though invented in 1862, was not used widely until World War I, because of an anti-machine mindset among the officer corps of Western Europe, which was drawn primarily from landed gentry rather than industrialists. Recognizing that "machines had brought with them industrialisation and the destruction of the traditional social order," these officers felt that they must hold the line on the battlefield: machines "must not be allowed to undermine the old certainties of the battlefield—the glorious charge and the opportunities for individual heroism."[13]

George Lucas's Jedi embody the kind of individual heroism that these officers want to preserve and promote. The Jedi, of course, do not eschew technology altogether. No Jedi feels dressed without his or her lightsaber.

But these are personal and indeed handmade weapons. Each Jedi is an artisan who designs and fashions his or her own weapon. Indeed, construction of the lightsaber signifies the culmination of a Jedi's training: As Darth Vader himself tells Luke Skywalker in *Return of the Jedi*: "I see you have constructed a new lightsaber. Your skills are complete." Their attitudes toward the lightsaber thus resemble the attitudes held by the original Luddites.

★ ★ ★

Imagine an empire ruled by a man whom some accuse of being a tyrant and others describe as being mad. To counteract the rising crime rate brought about by overcrowding in slums, widespread disease, and high food prices, the imperial authorities enforce what we know popularly as the "Bloody Code." It lists more than two hundred crimes that are punishable by death. By far, the majority of these are crimes against property rather than persons. The code is designed to eliminate what the upper echelons of society consider an unredeemable criminal class. Children can be executed for stealing spoons. Inevitably, there is a rebellion.

This description might remind you of the universe depicted in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, but in fact the empire to which I refer existed not so long ago and not so very far away. Its ruler was named not "Palpatine" but "George III"; its capital was called not "Coruscant" but "London." And the "rebellion" in question is neither the one led by Leia, Luke, and company, nor the revolution led by those who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776; it is, rather, the Luddite Rebellion, which erupted in Nottinghamshire in 1811 when stocking-knitters broke into workshops and sabotaged the "wide-frame" machines that were threatening their livelihoods.

The term *Luddite* has come to signify an irrational hatred of technology and progress. But recently historians have argued that the Luddites were not opposed to machines and technology per se; what they opposed was the use of machines to establish a system of economic and social domination. After all, those who became Luddites had worked since the sixteenth century on relatively complex knitting machines, but machines used by a single individual, working out of a cottage or a small shop. In the early nineteenth century, however, these artisans saw their way of life threatened by the introduction of large-scale machines, housed in massive buildings, that automated a good deal of the weaving process. They recognized that these machines threatened to transform what had been the product of artisans into something that could be mass-produced. The Luddites were protesting the beginnings of the exploitation of the working classes that would accompany the onset of Industrialism.[14] In both the Luddite Rebellion and the rebellion that George Lucas imagines, we find an attempt to preserve and promote individual agency, and to instill an attitude toward

technology that harkens back to the conceptions of "art" or "skill" that are a part of the etymology of the term technology, an attitude that preserves the dignity of the individual.

What motivates both the Luddites and the Jedi, in contrast to Socrates, is not the fear of technology per se, but rather, the fear that technology will be removed from their control and misused to enhance the agency of the few at the expense of the many. The *Star Wars* films suggest that human beings must not only remain masters of the technologies they create, but masters who recognize the responsibilities that accompany mastery. The films use the droids C-3PO and R2-D2 as an ethical index: the good guys treat their advanced droids as sentient individuals worthy of respect and protection; the bad guys—the Trade Federation in *The Phantom Menace* (1999), the Empire in the original trilogy—use their droids as interchangeable and disposable robots. Interestingly, the droids did not exist in the first treatment for the film, which instead featured two Imperial bureaucrats modeled after the two farmers in Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (1958): they were there for comic relief. Later, as he began to flesh out the universe that he had imagined, Lucas decided to focus on the droid as "the lowest person on the pecking order, basically like the farmers in *The Hidden Fortress*."[15] The low standing of the droids becomes clear quickly when our heroes walk into the Mos Eisley Cantina. Full of all kinds of exotic aliens, the Cantina seems like a cosmopolitan sort of place, but the bartender points to the droids and tells Luke Skywalker: "We don't serve their kind here. They'll have to wait outside. We don't want them here."

Making the droids sympathetic and entertaining is one of the film's innovations, particularly in the aftermath of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Lucas's own *THX 1138* (1971), which depicted robot police who were cold and mechanical. It is important that they are known as "droids" rather than "robots," because it allows Lucas to avoid the negative connotations that tend to accompany the word "robot," which first appeared in 1921 in the play *R.U.R.* by the Czech playwright Karel Čapek. The word was coined by Čapek's brother, Josef, and it comes from the Czech word *robota*, which means "forced labor" or "servitude." R.U.R. stands for "Rossum's Universal Robots," and Čapek's allegorical play depicts a company whose founder, Rossum, (from the Czech *rozum*, meaning "reason") has discovered how to make artificial persons. His nephew realizes that by simplifying the process and stripping these persons of feelings and other unnecessary attributes, he can create the perfect worker: the robot. These robots are much in demand; eventually they are used as mercenaries, with devastating results. And when the wife of the company's director secretly has one of the scientists enable the robots to transcend some of their limitations because she feels sorry for them, disaster ensues. The robots revolt, and in the end all human beings but one—a worker—are killed. The play

ends when two robots—one male, one female—develop emotions: they will repopulate the earth with a new race of super beings.

The term "robot" is thus linked, from its very inception, to the idea that technology will destroy its creators if it is not used responsibly. The play was a success and opened in London, where it sparked debates and commentary from prominent intellectuals including George Bernard Shaw. Critics quickly recognized that one of Čapek's key sources was Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818). Shelley subtitled her novel "The Modern Prometheus," recognizing that the Prometheus myth is all about technological progress, the transmission of fire technology from the gods to human beings. Shelley understood the connection between the Prometheus myth and her era's increasing faith in scientific and technological progress; her modern Prometheus is deluded by his mastery of technology into thinking he is a god.

If fire is humankind's first tool, then the robot is the ultimate tool: the machine that can perform tasks that were once only the province of human beings. In *R.U.R.*, the company director's dream is a world in which robots have freed humankind from the necessity to labor, essentially undoing the curse of original sin: "There'll be no employment," he says, "but everybody will be free from worry, and liberated from the degradation of labour. Everybody will live only to perfect himself."[16] The various versions of Frankenstein suggest a less idealistic attitude: near the beginning of *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Colin Clive as Frankenstein laments the failure of his experiment: "I did it. I created a man. And who knows in time I could have trained him to do my will. I could have bred a race." This Frankenstein does not seem interested in engendering another free and equal being; he seems, instead, bent on the creation of a race of robots that will do his bidding. The films further suggest the robotic nature of the monster in a way that Shelley did not by implanting bolts into the side of the monster's neck—pieces of machinery that have now become a permanent part of Frankenstein's pop iconography.

★ ★ ★

Narratives about robots investigate what happens when the lines between the human and the machine begin to blur. From *Frankenstein* through *R.U.R.*, from *2001* to the *Terminator* and *Matrix* films, the creation of an intelligent machine is continually depicted as both a dream and a nightmare, the highest possible achievement of human technology, but potentially the achievement that will be the undoing of humanity. Even in the ostensibly enlightened culture depicted by *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Voyager*, which feature an android commander and a holographic doctor respectively, these nearly human machines experience glitches that frequently render them dangerous to their fellow crewmen.

The *Star Wars* films feature a relatively enlightened attitude toward this blurring of boundaries, not only in their sympathetic depiction of the droids but also in the choice to transform each of the series' two main protagonists—Darth Vader and his son, Luke Skywalker, into cyborgs, humans augmented with robotic parts. In the first film, Obi-Wan comments about Darth Vader that he has become more machine than man, but the overall arc of the film suggests that the mechanization of Vader is only an external manifestation of his decision to dehumanize himself by embracing the "Dark Side" of the force. And Obi-Wan himself becomes something of a Frankenstein figure whose overstepping of boundaries leads ultimately to the creation of Darth Vader, a being in whom the human is nothing more than a ghost in the machine.

Vader comes closer than Luke Skywalker to embodying U.S. pop culture's image of the cyborg as a monstrous hybrid, a version of Frankenstein's monster whose most prominent features are his neck bolts and jagged scar. In fact, however, the cyborgs that any of us are likely to meet on any given day are neither grotesque nor threatening. My aunt, for example, is a cyborg, because she has a machine implanted in her: she has a pacemaker. Such a cyborg does not make us uncomfortable. But what if people were to have chips implanted in their brains that could heighten their intelligence? We start to get squeamish. We start to worry about whether such people are altered in some fundamental way. Our understanding of human identity starts to seem unclear, even fragile.

For the feminist theorist of technology Donna Haraway, the cyborg is important as a cultural icon precisely because it poses these kinds of challenges to the normative views about identity imposed by our individualistic culture. She suggests that the cyborg may serve not only as a symbol of late-twentieth-century conceptions of identity but also as a challenge to the political systems that engender and enforce them:

> From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a *Star Wars* apocalypse waged in the name of defense. . . . From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.

For Haraway, the "political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point."[17]

For the crew of the Starship *Enterprise*, firmly rooted in the individualist order that is one of Haraway's primary targets, such a world, seen from either perspective, represents the ultimate horror. Indeed, the most fearsome enemy in the later *Star Trek* series is the Borg, a race of voraciously imperialistic

cyborgs who seek "to raise quality of life for all species" in the galaxy by establishing a "new order" in which all technologies, cultures, and species will be assimilated, becoming "one with the Borg." Each physical Borg unit may look like an individual humanoid, but in fact each is simply a cog in a giant machine, an expendable part of a greater whole. Assimilation into the collective intelligence that is the Borg means not only loss of humanity but also loss of individuality. Darth Vader at least has that.

The Borg serve as an allegory for late-twentieth-century fears about what technology does to us: It strips us of individuality; it mechanizes us; it makes us part of a hive-mind. It should come as no surprise that the Borg were also the most popular villain among *Star Trek* fans. Indeed, in a bid to boost ratings for the fourth series, a female Borg named Seven-of-Nine was added to the crew of the Starship *Voyager*, and many of the show's episodes during its final seasons revolved around the problems attending her resocialization into humanity. Similarly, the foe that dominated the final seasons of the third Star Trek series, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999), was the Dominion, a technologically advanced society of shapeshifters whose natural state is liquid rather than solid and whose idea of Nirvana is to merge into a collective state called "The Link," in which the concept of individuality is meaningless. The Borg and the Dominion tap into some of U.S. culture's deepest fears, and late-twentieth-century films such as the *Alien* series (1979–1997), *Starship Troopers* (1997), *The X-Files* (television series 1993–2001, film 1998), and *The Matrix* (1999) employ the hive mind in a similar fashion, depicting it as an enemy to be combated.

These representations all draw upon the post-nuclear logic of the Cold War imagination. Often, they are latter-day manifestations of the fears dramatized in such science-fiction films of the 1950s as *The Thing* (1951), *Invaders from Mars* (1953), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and *The Blob* (1958). In *Them!* (1954), giant ants—like the Cold War itself a product of the nuclear age—are described as "chronic aggressors [who] make slave laborers out of their captives." A scientist in the movie shows a film about the ants and emphasizes the "industry, social organization, and savagery" of the ants, warning that "unless the queens are destroyed, man as the dominant species on this planet will probably be destroyed." To the audience within the film watching the documentary footage, the scientist is talking about ants, but to the 1950s audience watching *Them!*, he is quite clearly talking about Communism. Indeed, near the end of the film, when the army is sent to Los Angeles to do battle with the ants, a reporter asks, "Has the cold war gotten hot?" making the allegory explicit. And in *The Blob*, individuals in a small town are assimilated by the voracious blob, which grows larger with each human meal and can only be defeated through a kind of literal cold war: it is frozen with a multitude of C02 fire extinguishers and then dropped into the ice of the Arctic.

The hive mind scares us because it is a mind that resembles a machine. It seems soulless, devoid of that prized quality individuality. Twentieth-century U.S. popular culture often used it as a figure for communism. But depictions of the hive mind persist even with the waning of communism in Europe and that is because there are other fears that find expression in depictions of the hive mind. First, hives are communities governed by queens. They are matriarchies, and thus represent a challenge to the patriarchal norms that undergird U.S. popular culture. In *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996), we see that Captain Jean-Luc Picard's assimilation into the Borg collective is a form of rape, in which he is penetrated and feminized. The hive mind is thus a challenge to traditional—that is, rugged and male—individualism.

Second, the Borg's desire to "assimilate" other species invokes the depictions of the hive mind as a threat to individualism that can be found in nineteenth-century yellow peril fictions like P. W. Dooner's *Last Days of the Republic* (published in 1880, two years before the Chinese Exclusion Act), which depicted all Asians as insect-like automata who, if allowed to immigrate and participate in American democracy, would inevitably overrun the United States and assimilate its culture. During this period, the Chinese were described as completely alien because their culture was regarded as the antithesis of American individualism. Putting self-interest aside, the Chinese banded together and managed to undercut white labor by working harder and for lower wages; they were depicted as inhuman in their ability to subsist on starvation wages. According to a message sent by the California legislature to the U.S. Congress in 1877, the "compensation" for Chinese labor "is so low in proportion to the necessities of life in California that the white laborer cannot compete with the Chinaman."[18] Indeed, although the original *Star Wars* trilogy seems at first to have an enlightened attitude toward race—one of the marks of the Empire's illegitimacy is its discrimination against nonhuman species—the Orientalist depiction of the Trade Federation's Neimoidians in *The Phantom Menace* draws on the latter-day yellow peril imagery that was present in 1930s serials like *Flash Gordon*.

What I am suggesting through these brief examples is that in contemporary U.S. popular culture, worries about technology are often about more than just technology itself. They are also about the shifting paradigms for identity that marked the twentieth century and will continue to mark the twenty-first.

In 1997, the year that the *Star Wars* trilogy was rereleased with great commercial success, Ted Kaczynski, the "Unabomber," was brought to trial. The *New York Times* described Kaczynski as the "ultimate technophobe," and in his manifesto, "Industrial Society and Its Future," Kaczynski wrote that "modern man has the sense that change is imposed on him, whereas the 19th-century frontiersman had the sense that he created change himself, by

his own choice." By destroying technological society, Kaczynski believed, humankind could regain that sense of control, living alone or in small groups and communing with "wild nature." But even as Kaczynski's manifesto attacks technology in the name of individualism, it also assails "leftists" and "feminists" because they are "anti-individualistic [and] pro-collectivist."[19] Kaczynski was an extremist to be sure, but what I am suggesting is that he presents a pathological version of a set of fears that seems to run deep within U.S. culture. Often, fear of technology acts as a cover for fears about the changing dynamics of class, gender, sexuality, and race. When Americans think about cloned sheep, IBM's chess-playing supercomputer Deep Blue, or Internet e-commerce with suspicion, it is the same suspicion with which they regard group-oriented ideas such as affirmative action, feminism, and socialism: all of these fears represent manifestations of anxiety about the erosion of individual agency. In short, what appear to be disparate phenomena are, in fact, manifestations of a single set of cultural anxieties.

★ ★ ★

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In 1977, *Star Wars* blazed across the screen to become one of the highest grossing and most beloved movies of all time. It was followed by two sequels and three prequels, all of which became blockbusters. Comic books, novels, graphic novels, and magazines devoted to the films have added to the mythology of George Lucas's creation. Despite the impact of the franchise on popular culture, however, discussion of the films from a scholarly perspective has not kept pace with the films.

In *Myth, Media, and Culture in* Star Wars: *An Anthology*, Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka have assembled an intriguing collection of essays addressing the influences that shaped the films and how the series has affected popular culture. Contributors discuss the *Star Wars* universe and what its connection to various cultural touchstones—from fairy tales and Joseph Campbell to Disneyland and Marvel comics—means to viewers.

Essays examine the films as well as incarnations of the *Star Wars* universe in video games, comic books, and television programs, including the films' influence on new generations of filmmakers. A companion volume to *Sex, Politics, and Culture in* Star Wars, *Myth, Media, and Culture in* Star Wars is a diverse collection of criticism that investigates the dynamic force *Star Wars* has become in popular culture, from every imaginable angle.

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